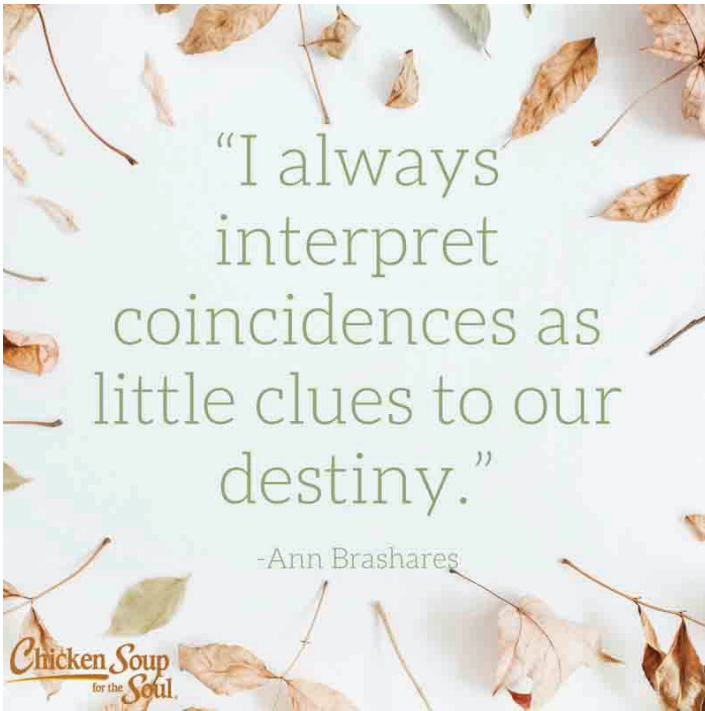


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Removal, Grinding, Chipping, Trimming

605-725-WOOD

Mason Dinger: 605-216-6098

Trevor Zeck: 605-216-8910



**DAKOTA TREE
COMPANY**

Today

Girls' Basketball Regions continue

Open: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave.

The cardboard/paper
recycling trailer at the school is **Open**

How to Prepare for Emerald Ash Borer

By Greg Josten, State Forester

Emerald ash borer is coming. It has been found in 31 states, including Minnesota, Nebraska and within 80 miles of our border in Iowa. While we haven't found it in South Dakota yet, it is just a matter of time.

The borer, commonly referred to as EAB, is a relatively small insect. It repeatedly attacks the ash tree, growing in numbers each year and consuming only the layer of tissue beneath the bark that is vital to the tree's survival. It's stealthy too, attacking the top of the tree first, so it's hard to find. The tree dies about seven years after the first attack. Our ash trees, unlike the ash trees in Asia, where the insect came from, are completely defenseless against this insect.

Ash is one of the most abundant trees in South Dakota. It was planted extensively in our communities and in windbreaks after Dutch Elm disease started killing our American elms in the 1960's. It is also native to our state and can be found along our streams, rivers and in our woodlands.

The borer moves from tree to tree by flying. It moves from city to city, and county to county, usually by movement of infested firewood. But it's also a good hitch hiker, clinging to vehicles as they travel our highways.

One of the things South Dakotans can do before EAB arrives is limit the movement of firewood. If you need to buy firewood, purchase it locally and make sure it was cut locally. If it isn't local wood, make sure it is certified to be free of insects. If you're going camping and want to have a campfire, get the wood at the campground and don't take any wood home with you.

EAB only attacks and kills ash trees, but it will do so indiscriminately. Healthy and unhealthy trees will be lost. We can prepare for the future by removing ash trees that are in poor condition now and replace them with young trees of different types. While it won't protect us from EAB this time around, increasing the diversity of tree types in our communities and countryside will ensure more resilience to losses from invasive insects and diseases in the future.

For more information on EAB, go to the SD Department of Agriculture website sdda.sd.gov, under Conservation & Forestry, Forest Health, Invasives. You can also attend the EAB Legislator Briefing at the Capitol, in room 414, on Feb. 26 at 3 p.m. CDT.

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Gas Price Averages Trending Cheaper on the Week Nationwide

February 20, 2018 - The national gas price average has been steadily decreasing for nearly two weeks dropping from the year-to-date high of \$2.61 (on February 5) to today's national average of \$2.53. Motorists in nearly every state, including South Dakota, are paying less on the week with Midwest and Southern states seeing the largest price drops at the pump. Hawaii (+2 cents) and Indiana (+1 cent) were the only states to see increases.

South Dakota Average Gas Prices:

Current Avg. \$2.557
Yesterday Avg. \$2.555
Week Ago Avg. \$2.572
Month Ago Avg. \$2.508
Year Ago Avg. \$2.329

"The question isn't how low will they go, but how long will we see prices decline," said Marilyn Buskohl, AAA South Dakota spokesperson. "A handful of major refineries are undergoing maintenance. If production slows at a high rate and/or if crude oil prices jump, these events could push pump prices back up in late February or March."

Today's national gas price average is 4 cent less than one week ago, 1 cent more than a month ago, but 25 cents more than a year ago.

Quick Stats

The largest monthly decreases are: Michigan (-19 cents), Illinois (-13 cents), Ohio (-13 cents), Kentucky (-10 cents), Indiana (-8 cents), Alaska (-5 cents), Maryland (-5 cents), Georgia (-5 cents), Mississippi (-4 cents) and North Carolina (-4 cents).

The nation's top ten least expensive markets are: Texas (\$2.27), Mississippi (\$2.27), Missouri (\$2.27), Alabama (\$2.27), South Carolina (\$2.28), Ohio (\$2.28), Arkansas (\$2.32), Oklahoma (\$2.33), Tennessee (\$3.33) and New Mexico (\$2.34).

Central and Great Lakes Region

Gas prices decreased at the pump all across the Great Lakes and Central region except in Indiana (+1 cent). On the week, Michigan (-11 cents), Ohio (-7 cents), Kentucky (-6 cents), Nebraska (-6 cents), Illinois (-6 cents) and Iowa (-6 cents) lead the region in price drops and land on the top10 states with the biggest changes list. A few states, including South Dakota (-2 cents) and North Dakota (-2 cents) did not see quite as high price drops.

North Dakota (\$2.61) continues to sell the most expensive gas in the region and the 13th most expensive in the country. Motorists there are paying 31 cents more for a gallon of unleaded compared to this time last year.

Oil market dynamics

At the close of Friday's formal trading session on the NYMEX, WTI increased 34 cents to settle at \$61.68. Crude prices may continue to trend higher this week amid signs of continued growth in U.S. oil production. Market watchers will closely monitor to see how much a surge in U.S. production eats into OPEC's efforts to rebalance the market to determine the impact it has on crude oil prices.

Motorists can find current gas prices along their route with the free AAA Mobile app for iPhone, iPad and Android. The app can also be used to map a route, find discounts, book a hotel and access AAA roadside assistance. Learn more at AAA.com/mobile.

AAA provides automotive, travel, and insurance services to 58 million members nationwide and nearly 97,000 members in South Dakota. AAA advocates for the safety and mobility of its members and has been committed to outstanding road service for more than 100 years. AAA is a non-stock, non-profit corporation working on behalf of motorists, who can now map a route, find local gas prices, discover discounts, book a hotel, and track their roadside assistance service with the AAA Mobile app (AAA.com/mobile) for iPhone, iPad and Android. For more information, visit www.AAA.com.

No. 11 Wolves Advance with 28-Point Victory over Golden Bears

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 11 Northern State University men's basketball team advanced to the quarterfinal round of the Sanford/Health NSIC Basketball with a 80-52 victory over Concordia-St. Paul from Wachs Arena. The Wolves improve to 28-3 overall, heading into a 12 p.m. match-up on Saturday from the Sanford Pentagon.

Northern made quick work of Concordia, notching 49 points in the first and 31 in the second. The Wolves shot 53.2 percent from the floor, 30.0 percent from the arc, and 61.5 percent from the free throw line. They out-rebounded the Golden Bears 40-34, and forced 12 turnovers while giving up just nine.

As a team, the Wolves combined for 46 points in the paint, 29 points off the bench, 19 points off turnovers, 13 second chance points, and four fast break points. They added six made 3-pointers, 19 assists, six steals, and four blocks.

Logan Doyle led five in double figures with 15 points and nine rebounds off the bench. The senior shot 66.7 percent from the floor, and added two assists and one steal. It was a tag team of the Northern State "biggs" as Carter Evans tallied a team second best 13 points and seven rebounds. Evans shot 55.6 percent from the floor and led the team with four assists and three blocks.

Darin Peterka notched 12 points, knocking down a team leading two from beyond the arc. He shot 50.0 percent from the floor, and recorded three rebounds, two assists, and two steals. Ian Smith and Bo Fries rounded out the Wolves in double figures with ten points apiece. Fries hit two long range baskets of his own, and shot 80.0 percent from the floor. Smith led the team with four assists and three steals, adding four rebounds and shooting at a 50.0 percent clip.

DJ Pollard and Gabe King added nine and seven points respectively as members of the starting five. Pollard tallied five rebounds and one assist, while King notched seven rebounds and three assists. Justin Decker hit the final four points for the Wolves, going a perfect 2-for-2 from the floor. He added two rebounds as well.

Northern returns to action this Saturday from the Sanford Pentagon. The Wolves will face off at 12 p.m. against the Bulldogs of Minnesota Duluth.

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Wolves Advance to NSIC Quarterfinals with Victory Over Upper Iowa

Aberdeen S.D. – Northern State University Women’s Basketball team rolled to an 85-42 victory in the first round of the NSIC/Sanford Health Basketball Tournament. NSU improved to 25-4 overall and advanced to the quarterfinal round to face Winona State University.

Wolves went on an 11-0 run in the first quarter to help give the Wolves a seven-point advantage heading into the second quarter. The Wolves out-scored the Peacocks 23-7 in the second quarter and didn’t look back. The Wolves shot 54.4 percent from the field in the first half and 41.0 percent in the second half. Northern State continued to extend the lead in the second half, out-scoring the Peacocks 41-21.

NSU shot 47.1 percent from the floor, 38.5 percent from behind the arc, and made 14-17 free-throws for the night. Defensively, the Wolves allowed Peacock to shoot 27.8 percent from the floor, the lowest of the season, 33.3 percent from the 3-point line, and only eight free-throw attempts. The Wolves also added a game high 47 rebounds, 13 second chance points off of 16 offensive rebounds, 23 points off of 20 Upper Iowa turnovers, and 38 bench points.

Miranda Ristau led all scorers with 26 points on 10-13 shooting, five rebounds, two assists, five blocks, and one steal. The other double figure scorer was Haley Froelich with 11 points, one rebound, one assist, and two steals. Jill Conrad had eight points, eight rebounds, two assists, and one steal. Brianna Kusler had eight points, three rebounds, and two assists.

Alexis Tappe had three points and three rebounds for the Wolves. Jessi Marti was the fifth starter and she had two points, four rebounds, five assists, and one steal. Off the bench for the Wolves Gabby Laimer had two points, one rebound, two assists, and two steals. Brynn Flakus had eight points, three assists, and five rebounds. Sara Tvedt had four points, four rebounds, and two assists.

Joie Spier and Alayna Johnson each had two points. Haley Rithmiller, Sarah Rozell, and Anika Fredrick each had three points. Rithmiller also had one rebound, Johnson had two rebounds. Kendall Kohler and Sydney Franks each had one rebound and Tori Mekash had two rebounds.

The Wolves are back in action Sunday in the quarterfinal round of the NSIC Tournament against Winona State. Tip-off is set for 12 p.m. at the Sanford Pentagon against the Warriors.

Trinity makes US News & World Report

The story of the Groton Historic Trinity Church's need for a new roof appeared in the US News & World Report on January 13, 2018. US News is one of the major national news magazines in the country, with a monthly online audience of over 20 million visitors and 120 million page views.

US News picked up the Trinity story from the Associated Press, which had picked it up from an Aberdeen News story in early January. Several South Dakota newspapers and radio stations also carried the Associated Press story, and eventually it ended up in the US News.

As a result of all this publicity, someone in Alaska mailed a \$100 check addressed simply to "Groton Community Historical Society, Groton SD", to help with the church roof repair project. The Society was very happy to receive this donation from so far away!

The Groton Community Historical Society ("GCHS") was established as a nonprofit organization in 2016 to accept ownership of and responsibility for the church. They recently launched a capital campaign to raise matching funds needed to apply for a Deadwood Fund Grant to replace the church's roof. The church was last roofed about 1975 by the Brown County Historical Society, which acquired the property then. Over the years shingles have blown off the South roof, and the branches of the gigantic tree overhanging the North roof have rubbed holes in that side. Water has seeped in, rotting and discoloring the roofing boards and ceiling below.

The estimated cost of replacing the roof is \$50,000. The rotted roofing boards will have to be replaced along with the shingles, and the huge tree on the North side will have to be severely trimmed or removed. GCHS is required to provide \$25,000 in matching funds or in-kind labor in order to qualify for a \$25,000 grant.

Donations for the project may be made by dropping checks payable to GCHS at City Hall, or mailing them to GCHS, PO Box 373, Groton, or depositing them directly to the GCHS account at First State Bank, Groton. All donations are fully tax deductible.

A booklet about the church's history, architecture and need for a new roof is available for review at the Groton City Hall or online at <http://www.city.grotonsd.gov/forms/Booklet.pdf>

Reasons for Abuse



By Richard P. Holm M.D.

There was once an abusive man. He was an only-child, growing up loved but overprotected. He always received praise for being a 'nice guy', but lacked the discipline to control sudden bouts of rage and anger. In school, he was protected from repercussion because his parents would pressure his teachers, and he dropped out of sports because he was intolerant of direction. His marriages failed because whenever he felt criticized, he would fly into a rage, and gradually the emotional abuse became physical with divorce to follow. When it was time to care for his elderly and dependent parents, he was again abusive. The parents were reluctant to confront him or call for help because they felt responsible. They were terrified of his rage and physical threat, or worse, feared he would ignore them and leave them helpless.

There are many theories for why people abuse others. Psychologists say that every case is different, and every abuser is driven by a different monster. Carrie Askin, a clinical social worker and author who has extensive experience with patients who are abusive, says that people commonly become abusive because they never learn to tolerate criticism and thus retaliate when they hear it. She states that abusers often learn from their youth that she or he is entitled not to hear criticism, has the right to punish anyone who violates that right, and can do so without any expectation of repercussion.

It is paradoxical that the most common reason for people to become abusive is because they did not experience fair discipline as a child. If one is to improve as a person, they must learn to take constructive criticism very early in life. Those who haven't accepted this life lesson and who respond to every disapproval with anger and retribution eventually live an isolated, ignorant, and unfulfilled life as people run from them when they come near.

There are other reasons why people become abusive. Sometimes it is people who have never known kindness and were abused themselves that become abusive, almost in self-defense. They were taught, by example, that abuse is 'normal' and 'deserved.' About one third of the children raised in this kind of environment become abusive adults. This means, however, that two out of three raised in a family with abuse do NOT become abusive.

Bottom line: abuse should never be tolerated. Children, spouses, and the elderly should be able to trust the people around them and live in a safe environment. Abused people should call for help from their physician, minister, social services, or even police.

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Show Choir performs at Disneyland



Groton's Prismatic Sensations performed at Disney Performing Arts as part of the band/choir tour this past week. The band was featured in yesterday's paper and these photos courtesy of Cody Swanson features the show choir.



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Council approves Schaller's retail beer and wine license

Julie Schaller is planning to open the Olde Bank 'n Cafe in what used to be Olde Bank Floral 'n More in downtown Groton. The city council granted Schaller a retail on/off malt beverage license so she can sell beer, and Kellie Townsend transferred the Retail on/off wine license to Schaller with the council approval. Schaller said she hopes to be open by the end of March.

The city council was a little short in numbers Wednesday evening. Eddy Opp has been in the hospital and he may be getting out today. David McGannon is still on vacation in Arizona and Burt Glover was in Sioux Falls. Mayor Scott Hanlon had Glover on speaker phone so the council would have its quorum.

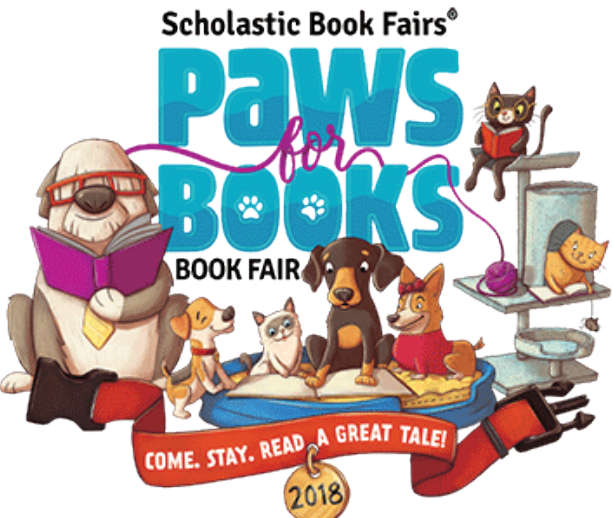
The Paint South Dakota Program was discussed. Councilman Karyn Babcock said she would like to see this program in Groton. It is an opportunity for homeowners, who qualify, to get their homes painted for free. Some sort of a group is needed to do the painting while the state provides the paint for free.

Finance Officer Hope Block reminded the council that the deadline to submit petitions for the council is tomorrow at 5 p.m. Burt Glover has his petition turned in. David Blackmun has his petition out and is working on getting signatures. David McGannon has not taken out a petition. In the event McGannon does not take out a petition, the mayor will make an appointment for the position for a one-year term.

The summer salary ordinance was given its first reading. The Junior Legion and Junior Teener coaches will receive \$2,000 for the season. The concession stand manager will receive \$50 a day and 50 percent of the net profits at the end of the season. This is different from last year where the concession stand manager received 50 percent of the gross receipts. No other changes to the summer salary ordinance was proposed.

The council decided to enter into a 10-year agreement with DGR Engineering for an electrical system study and 10-year forecast. The mapping will cost \$5,200 with annual costs of \$400 to \$500 a year to update the map once finished. A 10-year plan and a system study will cost \$17,400.

The council then went into executive session with Police Chief Stacy Mayou in attendance.



Scholastic Book Fairs®
PAWS for BOOKS
BOOK FAIR
COME. STAY. READ. A GREAT TALE!
2018

"Paws for Books"
Scholastic Book Fair
When: Monday, March 5, 2018
3:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Where: Groton Area Elementary
School Library

Maintenance Supervisor Wanted:

Under the direction of the Facility Administrator, the Maintenance Supervisor oversees the daily operations of the Maintenance. Performs maintenance and repair of physical structures of buildings.

Day Shift C.N.A. Wanted

Sign-on Bonus
☆☆☆ **\$1,500 for CNAs** ☆☆☆
Contact Brynn Pickrel or Nellie Hatfield at 605-397-2365 or apply in person.
EOE/AA/M/F/V/D-Drug Free Workplace



GROTON
CARE & REHABILITATION CENTER
1106 N. 2nd Street, Groton

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Groton City January Financial Report

January 2018

1st State Bank Checking Acct	\$ 459,975.97
1st State Bank Savings Acct	\$ 145,281.93
General Cash	\$ 200.00
Wells Fargo Savings Acct	\$ 102,702.53
SD FIT Acct	\$ 953,665.63
1st State Bank Water CD	\$ 80,000.00
SD FIT Water CD	\$ 100,000.00
BB Trust CD	\$ 1,500.00
SD FIT CD	\$ 200,000.00
Cemetery Perp Care CD	\$ 32,876.69
Total	\$ 2,076,202.75

Invested In		
Cash	\$ 200.00	0.01%
1st State Bank	\$ 719,634.59	34.66%
Wells Fargo Bank	\$ 102,702.53	4.95%
SD Fit	\$ 1,253,665.63	60.38%
Total	\$ 2,076,202.75	100.00%

	Beginning Cash Balance	Receipts	Expenditures	Transfers	Ending Cash Balance
General	\$ 393,874.61	\$ 177,182.72	\$ 78,800.33		\$ 492,257.00
Bed, Board, Booze Tax	\$ 1,231.28	\$ 2,206.01			\$ 3,437.29
Baseball Uniforms	\$ 1,710.20				\$ 1,710.20
Airport	\$ 14,913.87		\$ 2,400.12		\$ 12,513.75
**Debt Service	\$ 503,492.20	\$ 412.63	\$ 11,320.38		\$ 492,584.45
Cemetery Perpetual Care	\$ 34,706.69				\$ 34,706.69
Water Tower	\$ 180,000.00				\$ 180,000.00
Water	\$ 51,921.23	\$ 23,158.94	\$ 15,345.61		\$ 59,734.56
Electric	\$ 477,665.77	\$ 173,169.79	\$ 133,381.95		\$ 517,453.61
Wastewater	\$ 149,924.14	\$ 16,454.58	\$ 17,566.02		\$ 148,812.70
Solid Waste	\$ 26,668.42	\$ 6,741.77	\$ 42.61		\$ 33,367.58
Family Crisis	\$ 4,536.60	\$ 506.95	\$ 595.59		\$ 4,447.96
Sales Tax	\$ 17,450.94	\$ 10,829.59	\$ 9,618.96		\$ 18,661.57
Employment	\$ 2,354.66	\$ 920.10	\$ 4,886.15		\$ (1,611.39)
Utility Prepayments	\$ 632.58	\$ 4,494.76			\$ 5,127.34
Utility Deposits	\$ 71,829.58	\$ 815.25			\$ 72,644.83
Other	\$ 354.61				\$ 354.61
Totals	\$ 1,590,381.28	\$ 416,893.09	\$ 273,957.72	\$ -	\$ 2,076,202.75

**Debt to be Paid		
**2015 Refinance	\$ 2,775,000.00	by 12/1/2035
**Sewer Lagoon	\$ 55,068.52	by 1/1/2019
**West Sewer	\$ 123,851.51	by 10/15/2022
**RR Sewer Crossing	\$ 73,277.83	by 7/15/22
Total Debt	\$ 3,027,197.86	

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Today in Weather History

February 22, 1914: Heavy snow fell across parts of central and north-central South Dakota with 6 to 12 inches accumulations. Snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Timber Lake and Onida, 7 inches at Kennebec, and 12 inches at Murdo.

February 22, 2000: High temperatures across central and northeast South Dakota were in the 50s and 60s. Record highs occurred at Watertown, Pierre, and Kennebec. Watertown rose to 65 degrees, Pierre rose to 69 degrees, and Kennebec warmed to 71 degrees by late in the afternoon. Other high temperatures include; 55 degrees at Sisseton, 59 degrees at Aberdeen, and 64 degrees at Timber Lake.

1971: A 2-day blizzard dumped 36 inches of snow at Buffalo, and 25 inches at Gage, Oklahoma. Follett, Texas picked up 26 inches while Amarillo recorded 14 inches.

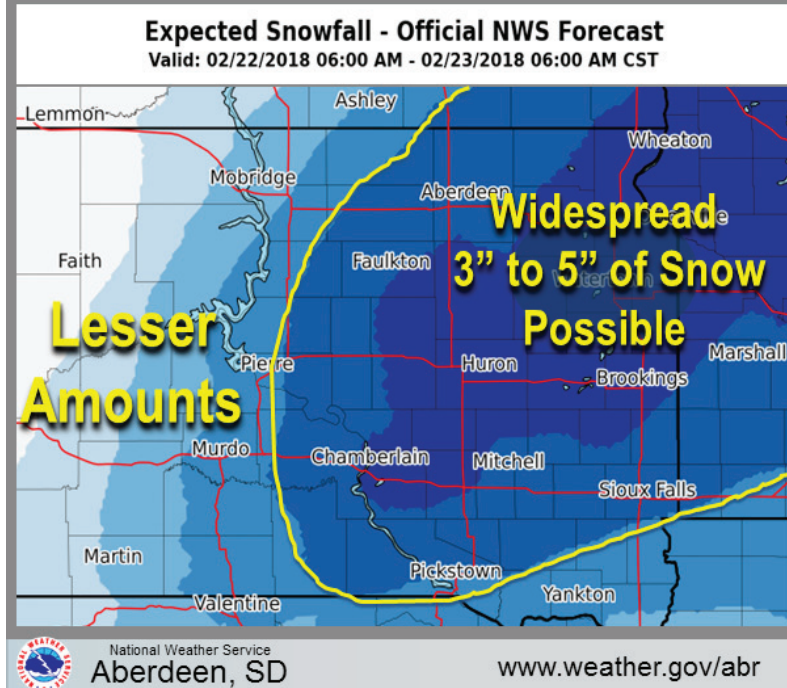
1998: Seven tornadoes struck east central Florida late on this date and early on the 23rd. Three of the tornadoes were rated F3 on the Fujita scale. 24 people were killed in Kissimmee alone. A total of 42 people were killed with 265 injured, and total damage was \$106 million dollars.

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Thu Feb 22	Fri Feb 23	Sat Feb 24	Sun Feb 25	Mon Feb 26	Tue Feb 27	Wed Feb 28
26°F	23°F	26°F	27°F	30°F	31°F	27°F
9°F	7°F	9°F	7°F	14°F	11°F	18°F
S 9 MPH Precip 100%	WNW 7 MPH	SSE 7 MPH Precip 40%	W 13 MPH	SSW 10 MPH	N 10 MPH	ESE 8 MPH

Snow Develops Today Lasting Through Late Afternoon/Evening



**Slick Roads For
The Afternoon
Commute**

**Send Us Your
Snowfall
Measurements
Via Twitter/FB**

Published on: 02/22/2018 at 5:12AM

Graphic Created
2/22/2018 5:11 AM

A weak system will cross the eastern Dakotas and much of Minnesota today with light snow which should accumulate to upwards of 5 inches, though along the Missouri valley and to the west we will see lesser amounts. Snow will develop in the mid to late morning hours across south central South Dakota and expand northeast through the afternoon. Snow will taper from south to north through the late afternoon and evening hours.

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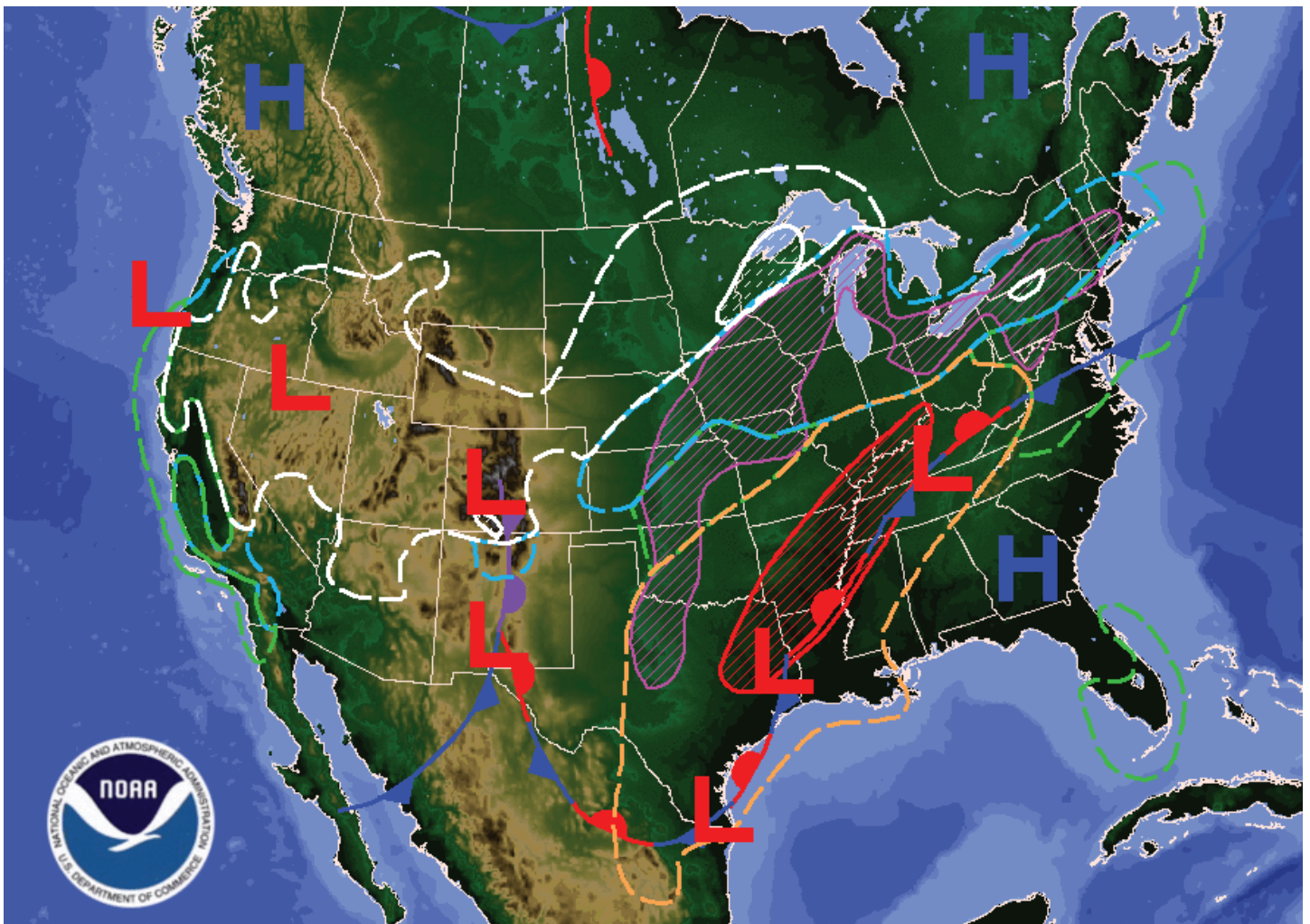
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 11.8 F at 4:16 PM
Low Outside Temp: -18.2 F at 3:33 AM
Wind Chill:
High Gust: 15.0 Mph at 1:56 PM
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 59° in 2000
Record Low: -24° in 1918
Average High: 30°F
Average Low: 10°F
Average Precip in Feb: 0.40
Precip to date in Feb: 0.09
Average Precip to date: 0.87
Precip Year to Date: 0.09
Sunset Tonight: 6:11 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Thu, Feb 22, 2018, issued 3:51 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Mcreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain	Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)
Rain and T'Storms	Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)
Rain and Snow	Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)
Snow	Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)

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A REASON TO BE GLAD

The word glad in Scripture carries with it the idea of happiness and joyfulness, pleasure and freedom. In God's Word, however, there is a source for this gladness: it is the Lord. The Psalmist writes, "For You make me glad by Your deeds, O Lord; I sing for joy at the works of your hands."

This source for our gladness does not come from anything we have accomplished or any ladder of success that we might have climbed. It does not come from wealth that we may have accumulated or records we have set. It does not come from any amount of power we have because of our achievements. This gladness that the Psalmist writes about comes from what God has done for us.

Another Psalmist wrote, "But may all who search for You be filled with joy and gladness. May those who love Your salvation repeatedly shout, 'The Lord is great.'" And another Psalmist said, "Let the godly rejoice. Let them be glad in God's presence."

We often set "goals" for ourselves that we think will bring a sense of well-being and fulfillment to us. They come from the "if only" statements we make: "If only I can get a promotion I will be satisfied," or "If only I had a larger home our family will be happy," or "If only..." and the list goes on.

But the "glad" that comes from God that can fill our hearts and lives comes as a result of what He has done for us: made possible our salvation through Jesus Christ, His Son and our Savior. Because of Him we can be glad and sing for joy, we can know that "all things are working together" for our good and His glory.

Prayer: How thankful we are, Lord, that we can have hearts filled with gladness because of Your love and grace. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 92:4 For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands.

2018 Groton SD Community Events

- Groton Lion's Club Bingo- Wednesday Nights 6:30pm at the Groton Legion (Year Round)
- 11/18/2017-3/31/2018 Groton Lion's Club Wheel of Meat- Saturday Nights 7pm at the Groton Legion (Fall/Winter Months)
- 1/28/2018 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 3/24/2018 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 4/13/2018 Elementary School Carnival, 5 p.m.
- 5/5/2018 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 5/28/2018 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program at the Cemetery, Lunch to follow at the American Legion (Memorial Day)
- 6/14/2018 Transit Fundraiser (Middle Thursday in June)
- 6/15/2018 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove
- 6/16/2018 Triathlon (Saturday before Father's Day)
- 7/4/2018 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 7/22/2018 Summer Fest (4th Sunday in July)
- 9/8/2018 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 10/6/2018 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/12/2018 Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/31/2018 Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/10/2018 Groton American Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)

- Best Ball Golf Tourney
- SDSU Golf Tourney
- Sunflower Golf Tourney
- Santa Claus Day
- Fireman's Stag
- Tour of Homes
- Crazy Dayz/Open Houses
- School Events

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News from the Associated Press

2 years in prison for Kyle man who stabbed boy

KYLE, S.D. (AP) — A Kyle man has been sentenced to two years in federal prison for stabbing a boy after ingesting methamphetamine.

Adam Lucas Brown earlier pleaded guilty to assault with a dangerous weapon. The 19-year-old admitted punching and stabbing a boy in the head last February at Brown's home in Kyle. Brown confronted the boy, identified in court documents only by the initials D.L.S., believing that he was trying to rob him.

The Rapid City Journal says Brown had also tried to stab the boy in the chest, but the knife blade got caught in the boy's shirt. The victim survived the attack.

Brown was also been sentenced to three years of supervised release.

Information from: Rapid City Journal, <http://www.rapidcityjournal.com>

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

04-16-17-29-30

(four, sixteen, seventeen, twenty-nine, thirty)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

14-16-23-25-33, Star Ball: 9, ASB: 3

(fourteen, sixteen, twenty-three, twenty-five, thirty-three; Star Ball: nine; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$21.41 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$204 million

Powerball

07-15-31-34-36, Powerball: 8, Power Play: 3

(seven, fifteen, thirty-one, thirty-four, thirty-six; Powerball: eight; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$246 million

Wednesday's Scores **By The Associated Press**

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Crow Creek 66, Winner 49

McLaughlin 70, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 46

Miller 80, Stanley County 66

Takini 68, Crazy Horse 46

___ Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Federal food safety agency recalls Fareway chicken salad

By DAVID PITT, Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The federal government issued a recall of chicken salad made by an Iowa processing company and distributed by Fareway Stores which has now sickened more than 100 people in five states and prompted lawsuits in Illinois, Iowa and South Dakota.

The Iowa Department of Public Health said it linked 115 cases of salmonella-related illnesses to the chicken salad sold by the Boone, Iowa-based grocery store chain. Fareway has more than 100 stores in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota.

Public health officials report a sick couple in South Dakota and one case each in Nebraska, Minnesota and Illinois are linked to chicken salad.

Jim Fox, 65, a convenience store assistant manager in Madrid, Iowa, was hospitalized twice after he fell ill on Feb. 4. The salmonella weakened him to the point that his heart began beating irregularly and his kidneys went into distress. He was hospitalized for five days.

"I swear to God, I've never been so sick in my life," Fox said.

He'd eaten Fareway chicken salad for years without trouble, he said. Fox has filled out paperwork to join others in a lawsuit to recover his medical costs and lost work.

The recalled chicken salad was bought between Jan. 4 and Feb. 9 and sold in plastic deli containers with a Fareway store deli label. The Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals said no chicken salad has been sold since Feb. 9.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service issued the recall Wednesday for 20,630 pounds of the chicken salad made at Triple T Specialty Meats Inc. The Ackley, Iowa, company grew from a family-owned meat locker to a federally inspected meat processor that provides a variety of processed foods for private label customers like Fareway, catering and mail order retail.

Any chicken salad from the recalled dates in any refrigerators or freezers should be thrown away.

Salmonella can cause diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever. Some people develop severe symptoms that require hospitalization.

Two lawsuits were filed in U.S. District Court in Des Moines by the same attorneys, including William Marler, a Seattle food safety expert. He represents Jeff Anderson, of Moline, Illinois, and Derek and Sarah Porter of Harrisburg, South Dakota. Anderson and Sarah Porter had to seek emergency medical attention.

Marler said the number of cases could reach several hundred before the outbreak is over.

"Unfortunately for Fairway and Triple T, this probably will be one of larger salmonella outbreaks in 2018," he said.

Both federal lawsuits allege Fareway distributed and sold adulterated chicken salad that was unsafe to eat when it was made available for sale to the public. Marler said he was amending the lawsuits to include Triple T.

Two lawsuits filed in state court in Des Moines by a West Des Moines woman and an Ankeny man carry similar allegations.

Greg Heikens, who owns Triple T with his wife, Jolene, said the plant is operating but not producing chicken salad. He said the source of the salmonella has not been pinpointed.

"I can tell you that the USDA was in here and the FDA was in here at the same time and the reports came back and it looks good for us," Heikens said. "Our plans are intact and they're working. We have all our internal temperatures where they need to be. It's a mystery at this point."

Marler said it can be difficult sometimes to pinpoint the exact cause in products with several ingredients like chicken salad. In a 2005 case, a blend of diced celery and onions used in chicken salad sold at Costco stores was believed to have been the source of E. coli contamination.

Fareway posted on its website "that this incident is not the result of anything done by Fareway. We also have no reason to believe this involves any other products."

Fareway was offering a refund to consumers who bought the chicken salad.

South Dakota Senate panel rejects refugee resettlement bill

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A state Senate panel has rejected a bill aiming to suspend refugee resettlement into South Dakota from countries on “any federal travel ban list.”

The Senate State Affairs Committee voted 8-1 Wednesday against the bill, which would have also directed the state to refuse “chain migration” from citizens of countries on such a list. That system gives advantages to the relatives of legal immigrants.

Matt Konenkamp, a policy adviser to Gov. Dennis Daugaard, asked the panel to oppose the bill, saying the state of South Dakota has no jurisdiction over refugees or immigration policy.

Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota, which provides resettlement services for refugees, opposed the bill.

Republican Sen. Neal Tapio, the sponsor, has said the federal government doesn’t have the right to “make your neighborhood less safe.”

Judge orders gov’t review of Keystone pipeline documents

By **MATTHEW BROWN, Associated Press**

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Federal officials must go back and review documents related to the disputed Keystone XL oil pipeline, under a Wednesday court ruling that came after environmentalists accused President Donald Trump’s administration of withholding details on the project’s approval.

U.S. District Judge Brian Morris said the government must provide any relevant documents by March 21 or explain why they should be withheld.

The ruling came in a lawsuit pending in federal court in Montana from environmentalists seeking to stop the 1,179-mile (1,897-kilometer) pipeline. It would carry crude from Canada’s oil sands region to U.S. refineries.

The project has become a flashpoint in the debate over climate change. It was blocked by former President Barack Obama in 2015 before President Donald Trump revived it last year.

U.S. Justice Department attorneys fought against releasing the sought-after documents. They said it could take more than six years and cost \$6.3 million for officials to go through an estimated 5 million pages of documents that would need to be reviewed before they could be released.

Attorney Jackie Prange with the Natural Resources Defense Council said the government’s time and expense estimate was “vastly overblown” and included documents unrelated to Keystone.

“The public has a right to know what evidence and what materials were considered in making that decision (to approve the pipeline), especially when that decision has changed,” Prange said.

Even in cases where the government withholds documents, Morris said it must provide a “privilege log” that includes a cursory description of the documents and explains why they can’t be released.

A spokesman for pipeline sponsor TransCanada Corp. said the Alberta-based company does not comment on ongoing litigation.

The company announced last month that it hopes to begin construction in 2019.

The pipeline would run from Canada through Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska, where it would connect to an existing pump station in Steele City, Nebraska. From there, it would continue through Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas to deliver crude to Gulf Coast refineries.

Follow Matthew Brown on Twitter at www.twitter.com/matthewbrownap .

House supports asking voters to make changes to Marsy’s Law

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House has approved a measure that would ask voters to make changes to a constitutional bill of rights for crime victims passed at the ballot in 2016.

House members voted 65-0 Wednesday to send the measure to the Senate.

It would ask voters to change provisions of the “Marsy’s Law” amendment including requiring victims to

opt into many rights and explicitly allowing authorities to share information with the public to help solve crimes.

House Speaker Mark Mickelson, the sponsor of the proposed changes, has said Marsy's Law has caused unintended consequences. Critics say it's causing problems for law enforcement and prosecutors and spiking costs for counties.

Mickelson's measure is advancing with the support of the group that campaigned to pass Marsy's Law.

Sioux Falls teacher fights for special cancer treatment

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls teacher has been denied insurance coverage for special radiation to treat her brain cancer.

Katie Blunck, 32, learned of her rare cancer diagnosis after having a tumor removed from her brain last month. She told the Argus Leader that the disease attacking her brain cells, Anaplastic Pleomorphic Xanthro Astrocytoma Grade 3, is "very aggressive, hard to kill and considered incurable."

Blunck's insurance company has twice denied her coverage request for a special targeted form of cancer treatment called "proton radiation beam treatment." Blunck's doctor recommended proton therapy as a way to minimize radiation exposure to the rest of her brain, but her insurer has said it's "not medically necessary."

If the insurer denies her third request, Blunck will have to resort to "photon radiation," which she worries will damage brain cells that aren't cancerous. She's set to begin radiation Monday.

"I'm just hoping somebody can change it and say, 'yes,' so I can get the treatment that I need to save my life," Blunck said.

Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield said in one of its rejection letters that "further research is needed to prove the advantages of proton beam therapy over the other types of treatments."

After her second rejection, Blunck started reaching out to South Dakota's congressional delegation, state lawmakers and the Sioux Falls Education Association for help.

Blunck has also received financial support from her colleagues, who have raised more than \$7,400 through a GoFundMe page. The Sioux Falls School District and her coworkers also donated sick days so that she can still get paid through the remainder of the school year.

"The insurance company will be as they will be, and things will go as they will go," Blunck said. "But to know that I have so many people rooting for me ... this outpouring is so amazing."

Information from: Argus Leader, <http://www.argusleader.com>

South Dakota House passes pay hike for state legislators

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House has passed a bill that would give legislators a significant pay raise and tie their salaries to the state's median household income.

House members voted 50-16 Wednesday to send the bill to the Senate.

House Democratic leader Spencer Hawley, a supporter, says officials need to expand the base of people who can come out to the Legislature.

It would set legislators' salaries at one-fifth of South Dakota's median household income. U.S. Census numbers for 2015 show that would mean a raise of 70 percent for the state's 105 lawmakers to nearly \$10,200.

State lawmakers are currently paid \$6,000 per session plus a per diem allowance.

House legislators have also advanced a proposed constitutional amendment that would ask voters to approve similar provisions.

South Dakota panel rejects plan on constitutional changes

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota committee voted down a measure Wednesday that sought to end the ability of voters to bypass the Legislature and amend the state constitution.

The House State Affairs Committee rejected the plan, which would have required approval from the voters and the Legislature to enact a constitutional amendment. Right now, people who collect enough signatures to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot can ask voters to pass it without lawmakers' blessing.

Sister Lynn Marie Welbig, a lobbyist for the Presentation Sisters, said the measure would have stamped out the people's "real right to amend the constitution."

"Bills like this, while they're well intended, spread division and distrust among the people," she told the committee. "Please, I beg you not to try to do things to usurp those rights of the people."

House Speaker Mark Mickelson, a supporter, said there should be a "rigorous process" when amending the state constitution. It would have needed voter approval to take effect.

The panel debated several measures asking voters to impose tighter restrictions on amendments to the state constitution. Members tabled a plan that would have ended citizens' ability to gather names to propose constitutional amendments, instead only allowing amendments to originate in the Legislature.

But the panel did send a proposal to the full House that would require constitutional amendments to encompass only one subject. If approved by the Legislature, the measure would go to November voters.

Mickelson, the sponsor, said it's intended to make sure that people understand the idea they're voting for at the ballot box.

Democrats on the committee opposed the plan. Democratic Rep. Julie Bartling questioned how it would be implemented.

Tearful student asks Trump, 'How do we not stop this?'

By CATHERINE LUCEY and MATTHEW DALY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Spilling out wrenching tales of lost lives and stolen security, students and parents appealed to President Donald Trump to set politics aside and protect America's school children from the scourge of gun violence. Trump listened intently to the raw emotion and pledged action, including the possibility of arming teachers.

"I turned 18 the day after" the shooting, said a tearful Samuel Zeif, a student at the Florida high school where a former student's assault left 17 dead last week. "Woke up to the news that my best friend was gone. And I don't understand why I can still go in a store and buy a weapon of war. An AR. How is it that easy to buy this type of weapon? How do we not stop this after Columbine? After Sandy Hook?"

Trump promised to be "very strong on background checks." And he suggested he supported allowing some teachers and other school employees to carry concealed weapons to be ready for intruders.

On Twitter Thursday, Trump continued to discuss arming teachers and others at schools, though said that didn't mean giving guns to all teachers.

"I never said 'give teachers guns' like was stated on Fake News @CNN & @NBC. What I said was to look at the possibility of giving 'concealed guns to gun adept teachers with military or special training experience - only the best,'" he said.

Trump continued to argue that armed school employees could fire back against shooters. He said: "ATTACKS WOULD END!" and "GREAT DETERRENT!"

The president had invited the teen survivors of school violence and parents of murdered children in a show of his resolve against gun violence in the wake of last week's shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and in past years at schools in Connecticut and Colorado. The latest episode has prompted a renewed and growing call for stronger gun control.

Trump asked his guests to suggest solutions and solicited feedback. He did not fully endorse any specific policy solution, but pledged to take action and expressed interest in widely differing approaches.

He largely listened, holding handwritten notes bearing his message to the families. "I hear you" was written in black marker.

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Besides considering concealed carrying of weapons by trained school employees, a concept he has endorsed in the past, he said he planned to go "very strongly into age, age of purchase." And he said he was committed to improving background checks and working on mental health.

Most in the group Wednesday were emotional but quiet and polite.

But Andrew Pollack, whose daughter Meadow was killed last week, noted the previous school massacres and raged over his loss, saying this moment isn't about gun laws but about fixing the schools.

"It should have been one school shooting and we should have fixed it and I'm pissed. Because my daughter, I'm not going to see again," said Pollack. "King David Cemetery, that is where I go to see my kid now."

A strong supporter of gun rights, Trump has nonetheless indicated in recent days that he is willing to consider ideas not in keeping with National Rifle Association orthodoxy, including age restrictions for buying assault-type weapons. Still, gun owners are a key part of his base of supporters.

The NRA quickly rejected any talk of raising the age for buying long guns to 21.

"Legislative proposals that prevent law-abiding adults aged 18-20 years old from acquiring rifles and shotguns effectively prohibits them for purchasing any firearm, thus depriving them of their constitutional right to self-protection," the group said in a statement.

Several dozen people assembled in the White House State Dining Room. Among them were students from Parkland along with their parents. Also present were parents of students killed in massacres at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut. Students and parents from the Washington area also were present.

The student body president at the Parkland school, Julia Cordover, tearfully told Trump that she "was lucky enough to come home from school."

She added, "I am confident you will do the right thing."

Trump later tweeted that he would "always remember" the meeting. "So much love in the midst of so much pain. We must not let them down. We must keep our children safe!!"

Not all the students impacted by the shooting came to the White House.

David Hogg, who has been one of the students actively calling for gun control was invited but declined, said his mother Rebecca Boldrick.

"His point was (Trump needs) to come to Parkland, we're not going there," she said.

Throughout the day Wednesday, television news showed footage of student survivors of the violence marching on the Florida state Capitol, calling for tougher laws. The protests came closer to Trump, too, with hundreds of students from suburban Maryland attending a rally at the Capitol and then marching to the White House.

Inside the executive mansion, Trump said at the end of an hour listening to tales of pain and anguish, "Thank you for pouring out your hearts because the world is watching and we're going to come up with a solution."

Television personality Geraldo Rivera had dinner with Trump at his private Palm Beach club over the weekend and described Trump as "deeply affected" by his visit Friday with Parkland survivors. In an email, Rivera said he and Trump discussed the idea of raising the minimum age to purchase assault-type weapons.

Trump "suggested strongly that he was going to act to strengthen background checks," Rivera said.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein and Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., said Wednesday they would introduce a bill to raise the minimum age required to purchase rifles from gun dealers, including assault weapons such as the AR-15.

"A kid too young buy a handgun should be too young to buy an #AR15," Flake said on Twitter. A buyer must be 21 to purchase a handgun from a licensed gun dealer.

Trump embraced gun rights during his presidential campaign, though he supported some gun control before he became a candidate, backing an assault weapons ban and a longer waiting period to purchase a gun in a 2000 book.

On Tuesday, Trump directed the Justice Department to move to ban devices like the rapid-fire bump stocks used in last year's Las Vegas massacre. The White House has also said Trump was looking at a bill that would strengthen federal gun background checks.

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But those moves have drawn criticism as being inadequate, with Democrats questioning whether the Justice Department even has authority to regulate bump stocks and arguing that the background check legislation would not go far enough.

The department said its review of whether bump stocks are federally prohibited is ongoing but did not say how Trump's order would affect that.

An effort to pass bump stock legislation last year fizzled out.

On background checks, Trump has suggested he is open to a bipartisan bill developed in response to a mass shooting at a Texas church. It would penalize federal agencies that don't properly report required records and reward states that comply by providing them with federal grant preferences.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said the bill is "a small step," but said Democrats want to see universal background check legislation.

Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania said Wednesday that he'll probably reintroduce bipartisan legislation that would require background checks for all gun purchases online and at gun shows. He said he planned to discuss the idea with Trump.

That bill first emerged with backing from Toomey and Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia following the 2012 slaying of 26 children and adults in Connecticut's Sandy Hook Elementary School. It failed then and at least one more time since.

But Darrell Scott, the father of Columbine High School victim Rachel Scott, said he felt the president had been moved by the group's words.

"I feel like there's a different tone in the air," he said, "than there has been before."

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin and Sadie Gurman contributed from Washington. Marc Levy contributed from Harrisburg and Alina Hartounian from Phoenix.

Shooting town hall: Rubio on the defensive on gun control

SUNRISE, Fla. (AP) — Republican Sen. Marco Rubio was put on the defensive by angry students, teachers and parents who are demanding stronger gun-control measures at a town hall after the shooting rampage that claimed 17 lives at a Florida high school.

But Rubio, the lone Republican at CNN's "Stand Up" town hall Wednesday night, did say he would support laws barring those 18 and under from buying guns, support changing the background checks system and getting rid of bump stocks, which allow semiautomatic guns to mimic fully automatic fire.

One of those confronting the Florida senator was Fred Guttenberg, whose 14-year-old daughter Jaime was killed on Feb. 14 with 16 others. Rubio was the only Republican at the nationally broadcast gathering after Florida's GOP Gov. Rick Scott and President Donald Trump declined invitations to appear at the event in Sunrise, Florida.

Guttenberg told Rubio his comments about the shooting "and those of your president this week have been pathetically weak."

People stood up and cheered Guttenberg as he challenged Rubio to tell him the truth, to acknowledge that "guns were the factor in the hunting of our kids."

Guttenberg added, "And tell me you will work with us to do something about guns."

Rubio responded that the problems laid bare by the shooting rampage "cannot be solved by gun laws alone," drawing jeering whistles from the crowd. He said that if he believed an assault weapons ban "would have prevented this from happening, I would have supported it." That drew jeers. Visibly angry, Guttenberg responded: "That is a weapon of war."

Sen. Bill Nelson and Congressman Ted Deutch, both Democrats from Florida, also were present on a dais.

Nelson said he grew up on a ranch and hunted all his life.

"I still hunt with my son but an AK-47 and an AR-15 is not for hunting, it's for killing," said Nelson to applause.

Ryan Schachter, whose brother Alex, was fatally gunned down at Stoneman Douglas High School in

Parkland, Florida, was among those questioning the lawmakers.

"I'm supposed to go back to school in the upcoming week," said Schachter. "Me and my friends worry we are going to be murdered in our classrooms."

Student Cameron Kasky did not mince words telling Rubio, "It's hard to look at you and not look down the barrel of an AR-15 and not look at Nikolas Cruz" before asking squarely, "Can you tell me right now that you will not accept a single donation from the NRA?" The room erupted in cheers as Rubio replied that people buy into his agenda and that he supports laws to keep guns out of the hands of deranged people.

Rubio said he does not support arming teachers and Nelson agreed saying Trump's suggestion on arming them was "a terrible idea."

Shortly before the town hall event opened, the sheriff of the Florida county torn apart by the rampage spoke to the cheering audience, drawing them to their feet as he exhorted them to press on for stricter gun controls.

Sheriff Scott Israel of Broward County declared the U.S. has had enough of deadly shootings and that he was personally saddened to have to go through the crime scene of a "horrific killer" 30 minutes after the attack last week. He said the young people should hold lawmakers accountable for making their schools and other community places safer or they won't be re-elected.

"Never again!" he declared of the Parkland attack, exhorting the young people to press on: "America's watching you ... there will be change."

Again the question: Could armed teachers stop shootings?

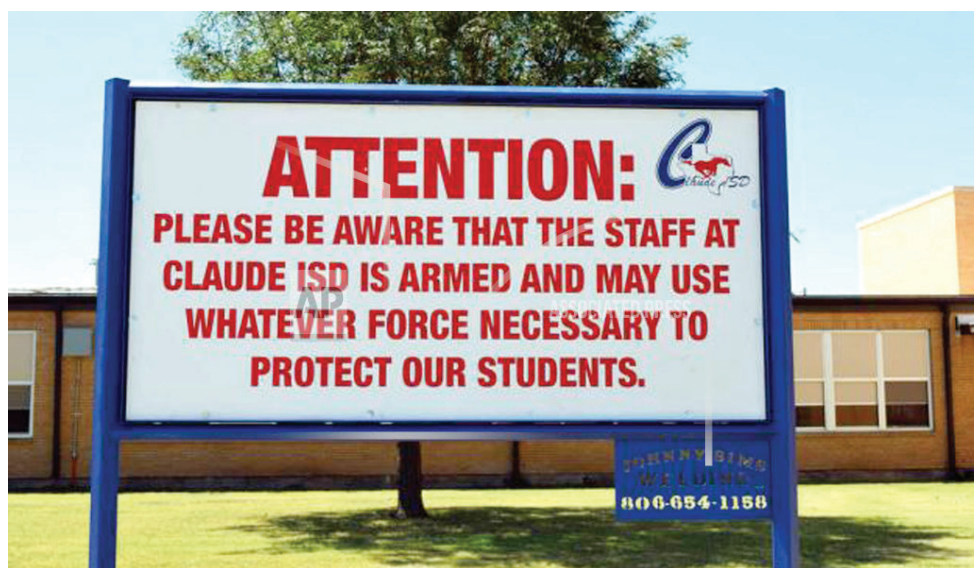
By CAROLYN THOMPSON, Associated Press

In the aftermath of yet another mass school shooting, President Donald Trump says that if one of the victims, a football coach, had been armed "he would have shot and that would have been the end of it."

Revisiting an idea he raised in his campaign, Trump's comments in favor of allowing teachers to be armed come as lawmakers in several states are wrestling with the idea, including in Florida, where the 17 most recent school shooting victims are being mourned.

Assistant football coach Aaron Feis, hailed for shielding students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, "was very brave," Trump said Wednesday during a listening session with parents and survivors of school shootings. "If he had a firearm, he wouldn't have had to run."

Florida Republican Sen. Greg Steube said gun-free zones like schools are easy targets and has



This August 2016 photo shows a sign outside a school in Claude, Texas, which Claude ISD posts outside their schools. In the aftermath of yet another mass school shooting, President Donald Trump says that if one of the victims, a football coach, had been armed "he would have shot and that would have been the end of it." Revisiting an idea he raised in his campaign, Trump's comments in favor of allowing teachers to be armed come as lawmakers in several states are wrestling with the idea, including in Florida, where the 17 most recent school shooting victims are being mourned.(Creede Newton/Amarillo

Globe-News via AP)

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proposed allowing specially trained educators with military or law enforcement backgrounds to be armed.

"Our most valuable, most precious resources are our children. Why in the world are we going to put them in a circumstance where there is nobody that is armed and trained at any of our schools to be able to respond quickly to an active shooter situation?" Steube told The Associated Press, even as students, including survivors of the Parkland shooting, rallied at the state's capitol in support of changes in gun laws.

Similar discussions have taken place in Kentucky, Colorado, North Carolina and Alabama in recent days and Wisconsin's attorney general said he's open to the idea.

"Our students do not need to be sitting ducks. Our teachers do not need to be defending themselves with a No. 2 pencil," Republican Alabama Rep. Will Ainsworth said in proposing a bill days after the Valentine's Day shooting in Florida.

The debate breaches statehouse walls, and teachers — and the public — are divided on the issue. A poll released this week by ABC News/Washington post says 42 percent of Americans believe teachers with guns could have prevented the Florida shooting.

Salt Lake City, Utah, teacher Kasey Hansen said the idea to arm herself in school began with the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, where 20 children and six adults died.

"It just really hit home that these teachers, all they could do was pile those kids in a corner and stand in front of them and hope for the best," said Hansen, who carries a concealed handgun as she teaches special education students.

"I'm not here to tell all teachers that they have to carry a gun," she said. "For me personally, I felt that it was more of a solution than just hiding in a corner and waiting."

Utah is among at least eight states that allow, or don't specifically prohibit, concealed weapons in K-12 schools, according to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

In Austin, Texas, teacher Tara Bordeaux can't easily see herself taking on that role, preferring to leave it to trained law enforcement officers.

"Would I get the same training and would I have the same type of instinct of when and how to use it?" asked Bordeaux, her state's 2018 teacher of the year. "I don't have any instincts in me to be an officer of the law. My instincts are to be a teacher."

Claude, Texas, Superintendent Brock Cartwright won't reveal how many or who among his teachers is armed, but the district's message to potential intruders blares in capital letters in three signs: "Please be aware that the staff at Claude ISD is armed and may use whatever force necessary to protect our students."

Like other administrators, Cartwright said armed teachers are just one part of safety plans that include drilling for emergencies and shoring up buildings. The small town east of Amarillo doesn't have a police department, raising concerns about the potential response time for law enforcement.

"Hopefully, we never have to use it," Cartwright said, "but if we do, our thought is we're going to hold off until help arrives."

The president of the 1.7 million-member American Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, called arming teachers "one of the worst ideas I have heard in a series of really, really, really bad ideas." Nevertheless, a tweeted offer by Butler County, Ohio, Sheriff Richard Jones to train local teachers to carry a concealed handgun garnered so much interest that he quickly capped the number at 300.

When asked by radio host Hugh Hewitt about arming teachers, his education secretary, Betsy DeVos, said states "clearly have the opportunity and the option to do that."

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich called for small groups of armed teachers in every school, and was quickly countered by Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut, who labeled it the new "gun industry business model - using the gun violence epidemic to sell more guns, make more profit."

Magnolia, Texas, parent Robert Morphew would want strict guidelines, including for teachers to be trained and licensed, to support guns in his son's high school.

"I do think it would be a deterrent, there's no doubt," he said.

In Buffalo, New York, parent Wendy Diina disagreed.

"Why am I trying to prevent someone from having a gun by giving a gun to someone else?" the mother

of two asked.

The National Association of School Resource Officers favors hiring more trained law enforcement officers, in part to ensure a teacher's gun won't mistakenly wind up in a student's hands.

Associated Press writers Jocelyn Gecker in San Francisco; Mallory Moench in Montgomery, Alabama; Nancy Benac and Jill Colvin in Washington; and Kantele Franko in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

Shiffrin gets silver in Vonn's last Olympic race; Gisin wins

By HOWARD FENDRICH, AP Sports Writer

JEONGSEON, South Korea (AP) — Mikaela Shiffrin already was assured of earning her third career medal, each in a different event, when Lindsey Vonn prepared to propel herself out of the starting gate as the final starter in the final race of her Olympic career.

This slalom portion of the two-leg Alpine combined would be the first — and only — time Vonn, 33, and U.S. teammate Shiffrin, 22, would compete against each other at any Olympics. Could Vonn possibly summon a "miracle," as she called it, a slalom performance from somewhere in her past to make a lead from the downhill portion stand up? Could Shiffrin hold onto her silver?

With the snow carefully descending under the artificial lights lining the course, the drama quickly dimmed. Vonn's slalom lasted all of about 10 seconds before she went off-course, leaving Shiffrin in second place Thursday between two women from Switzerland: gold medalist Michelle Gisin and bronze medalist Wendy Holdener.

Gisin, whose older sister Dominique tied for first in the 2014 Olympic downhill, produced a total time of 2 minutes, 20.90 seconds that was 0.97 seconds better than Shiffrin's. Holdener was nearly 1½ second off Gisin's pace, turning in the fastest slalom after standing 10th after the downhill.

Shiffrin ranked sixth in the downhill, 1.21 seconds slower than Gisin, and wasn't able to make up that large a deficit in her forte, the slalom, which was a much shorter track. The downhill took about 100 seconds; the slalom about 40.

"Clearly," said Shiffrin's coach, Mike Day, "the downhill didn't go quite to plan."

Still, Shiffrin added the combined silver to her giant slalom gold from a week earlier, giving her two medals — plus a surprisingly low fourth-place finish in the slalom — in three races. She arrived in South Korea to chatter about entering five, but after a series of weather-related schedule changes, wound up dropping two.

"It's really nice to be at the end of it," she said, "and know that I do have two medals."

With her slalom gold from the 2014 Games, Shiffrin joins Bode Miller and Julia Mancuso as the only Americans with a medal in each of at least three Alpine disciplines.

"It's like being a great butterflyer, being a great breastroker, being a great freestyler and being a great backstroker," Day said. "There's not many people who do all of those really well."

Eight years ago, it was Vonn who went to the Vancouver Olympics accompanied by outsized anticipation and unrealistic speculation (by others) about four or five medals. She, too, came away with two, then missed the Sochi Olympics after tearing knee ligaments.

At what she has said must be her last Olympics because her oft-injured body cannot endure another four years, Vonn added a bronze on Wednesday in the downhill, one of the races Shiffrin elected to skip to conserve energy.

After Vonn's slalom ended suddenly, she crossed paths with Shiffrin in the finish area. They had a brief exchange.

"I mean, it's incredible what she's able to accomplish. She's so young and she approaches ski racing much different than pretty much anyone else," Vonn said later. "I think she had potential to do a lot more at these Games, but at the same time — same like me, you can't expect everything all the time."

So, then, there they were as the sun settled behind the clouds, the temperature dipped and the last individual Alpine race of the Pyeongchang Games concluded. Yes, there is a team event Saturday, but

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neither Vonn nor Shiffrin is expected to enter, as is the case with the rest of the sport's biggest names, who would prefer to take a break before returning to the World Cup circuit.

Shiffrin is the best female skier of today, chasing a second consecutive overall title; Vonn is the best female skier in history, just five World Cup race wins away from tying Ingemar Stenmark's all-time record of 86.

Tears gathered in Vonn's eyes as she spoke about wishing she could be at Beijing in 2022, but knowing "that's just not the way it is," because, she explained, "My mind is still telling me I can do things that my body is telling me I can't."

Shiffrin, smiling and chuckling, talked about "a mix of thoughts right now," and her struggles with anxiety and internal pressures while dealing with postponements of the slalom and giant slalom, then the pushing up of the combined from Friday, making it all feel as if "someone was playing a game of ping-pong in my brain."

Neither can possibly know what the future will bring, of course.

But Vonn offered some words of caution about Shiffrin, who for quite some time, fairly or not, has been labeled "The Next Lindsey Vonn."

"She can ski for another 10 years and have a lot more medals and a lot more World Cups. But as I saw in my career, things can change quite quickly. You never know what's going to happen," Vonn said. "That's why you have to appreciate every moment that you have, because ski racing has a way of taking a lot from you."

___ More AP Olympic coverage: <https://wintergames.ap.org/>

Civil disobedience: Teen shooting survivors shake up Capitol

By JASON DEAREN, Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Holding hand-scrawled signs and wearing black "Parkland Strong" T-shirts, the 40 teenagers filed warily into a committee room at Florida's state Capitol on Wednesday. They hadn't been invited and the lawmakers they were intruding upon were in the middle of a meeting. Timid yet determined, they stood their ground.

And they got what they wanted: a chance to speak.

It was perhaps the first act of civil disobedience ever by the high school students whose lives were turned around just one week before by a shooting that left 17 of their friends and teachers dead. The teens politely stood up and told their stories to the politicians, some of whom a day earlier had voted against a ban on assault weapons.

"I had to run for my life," said Erika Rosenzweig, a slight, dark-haired 15-year-old sophomore at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland. "I had to listen as the dead were reported. ... I didn't know where my friends were. This cannot happen again."

When organizers first announced that they would bus students to the state's capital to lobby for stricter gun laws, there was only room for about 100, and the bus quickly filled up. So Rosenzweig and about 44 others made the roughly seven-hour drive to Tallahassee with the support of their Parkland synagogue. Kol Tikvah lost three of its congregants in the shooting.

By the end of the day Wednesday, the teens would meld in with their other classmates who organized the "Never Again" protests. But when they first arrived, they were on their own. Eyes still weighed by sleep after the long trip, the students walked down the long corridors of the capital building. Staffers quickly moved out of their way to let them pass, many thanking them or cheering them on.

They stopped in at the office of state Rep. Robert "Bobby O" Olszewski, an Orlando-area Republican who had voted against a debate on an assault-weapons ban the day earlier, helping to kill the bill. They surrounded his desk.

Grant Cooper, a 10th-grader from South Broward High who accompanied the Stoneman Douglas students, was fidgety and ready to pounce. "What logical reason is there for anyone to have an assault rifle? Why would you vote a ban down?" Cooper asked. Authorities say the Stoneman Douglas shooter used an AR-15.

Olszewski shifted in his desk chair, his aide nervously looking on from the doorway. He told Cooper it was complicated, that people have a Second Amendment right to bear arms and that he wasn't against a

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ban for people of certain ages. He said he was new to Tallahassee, had taken no money from the National Rifle Association and would work on some kind of change, but couldn't offer specifics.

The students were not impressed.

"Can you tell us names of other Republicans who we should meet with who will support us?" Cooper asked.

"I won't name names," Olszewski replied. "But anyone you visit on this floor I can tell you, you'll be batting a thousand."

The group walked out, eyes rolling.

"It's disheartening," Cooper said afterward. "But honestly, I didn't expect much better."

The students stopped in the labyrinthine hallway to consult a schedule and map of the building, then crammed into the office of state Rep. Barrington Russell, a Democrat who supports gun control.

Aria Siccone, a 14-year-old freshman at Stoneman Douglas, held a sign that said "Ban Assault Rifles Now." Her nails were painted black, and she wore a small heart pendant around her neck. She was in a classroom targeted by the shooter, identified as 19-year-old former Stoneman Douglas student Nikolas Cruz.

"I saw three of my classmates from that period on the floor and they didn't make it," the girl said, barely making it through her story.

The lawmaker, a Jamaican native who said he'd been held at gunpoint more than once in his life, rose from his chair and put his arm around Siccone.

"For some reason the NRA has a very strong hold on some of my colleagues that prevents them from doing the right thing," he said.

After the meetings with Russell and Olszewski, the group headed for the committee meeting. Later in the day, they would lie down and pose as corpses in a silent protest outside Gov. Rick Scott's Capitol office. And staffers wouldn't disturb them.

Ira Jaffe, a parent whose son couldn't make it to Tallahassee because he was attending two of his classmates' funerals, held the door as the students filed into a room.

"What are we doing now?" one asked.

"We're interrupting a committee meeting," Jaffe said matter-of-factly.

"That's awesome," the teen replied.

Rabbi Bradd Boxman, who had chaperoned the teens, was boiling with anger and sadness when he interrupted the meeting to announce the students' presence.

Rep. Shawn Harrison, the committee's vice chair, told the students they could speak briefly. "We will never doubt your impact on this debate," Harrison said. "We know your hearts are in the right place."

Rosenzweig told of her terror, and Cooper repeated his earlier question about the assault-weapons ban.

Moments later, the students, brimming with confidence, gathered outside the Capitol, raised their signs, and marched straight ahead, yelling, "We are MSD! We will make history!"

And then they disappeared into the crowd, joining with other protesters and the thousands who had gathered to support them.

Follow Jason Dearen on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/JHDearen>

Florida students pushing for gun regulations face pushback

By **BRENDAN FARRINGTON, GARY FINEOUT and TERRY SPENCER, Associated Press**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — The students who swarmed Florida's state capitol in the wake of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High massacre want the Legislature to enact stricter limits on guns. What that might entail remains debatable — if any changes are forthcoming at all.

The 100 Stoneman Douglas survivors who traveled 400 miles to Tallahassee were welcomed into the gun-friendly halls of power Wednesday, but the students' top goal — a ban on assault-style rifles such as the weapon used in the massacre — was taken off the table a day earlier, although more limited measures are still possible.

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Republican legislative leaders say they will consider legislation that will likely call for raising the age limit to purchase a rifle from 18 to 21 and increasing funding for mental health programs and school-resource officers, the police assigned to specific schools.

Lawmakers are also considering a program promoted by one Florida sheriff that calls for deputizing someone to carry a weapon on campus. Legislators may also enact a waiting period for rifle purchases.

The suspect, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, has been jailed on 17 counts of murder and has admitted the Feb. 14 attack. Defense attorneys, state records and people who knew him indicate that he displayed behavioral troubles for years, including getting kicked out of the Parkland school. He owned a collection of weapons.

"How is it possible that this boy that we all knew was clearly disturbed was able to get an assault rifle, military grade, and come to our school and try to kill us?" one 16-year-old student asked the president of the state Senate, Joe Negron.

Negron did not answer directly. "That's an issue that we're reviewing," he said.

Outside the capitol building Wednesday, many protesters complained that lawmakers were not serious about reform, and they said they would oppose in future elections any legislator who accepts campaign contributions from the National Rifle Association.

"We've spoke to only a few legislators and ... the most we've gotten out of them is, 'We'll keep you in our thoughts. You are so strong. You are so powerful,'" said Delaney Tarr, a senior at the high school. "We know what we want. We want gun reform. We want commonsense gun laws. ... We want change."

She added: "We've had enough of thoughts and prayers. If you supported us, you would have made a change long ago. So this is to every lawmaker out there: No longer can you take money from the NRA. We are coming after you. We are coming after every single one of you, demanding that you take action."

The crowd burst into chants of "Vote them out!" as speakers called for the removal of Republican lawmakers who refuse to address gun control issues. One sign read, "Remember the men who value the NRA over children's lives" and then listed Republicans in Florida's congressional delegation. Other signs said, "Kill the NRA, not our kids" and "These kids are braver than the GOP."

About 30 people left an anti-gun rally outside Florida's Old Capitol and began a sit-in protest at the office of four House Republican leaders, demanding a conversation about gun legislation.

"They're not speaking to us right now. We only asked for five minutes and so we're just sitting until they speak," said Tyrah Williams, a 15-year-old sophomore at Leon High School, which is within walking distance of the Capitol.

In Washington, students and parents delivered emotional appeals to President Donald Trump to act on school safety and guns. The president promised to be "very strong on background checks," adding that "we're going to do plenty of other things."

And at a news conference Wednesday, Broward County, Florida, Sheriff Scott Israel ordered all deputies who qualify to begin carrying rifles on school grounds. The rifles will be locked in patrol cars when not in use until the agency secures gun lockers and lockers, he said.

"We need to be able to defeat any threat that comes into campus," Israel said.

The sheriff said the school superintendent fully supported his decision.

Stoneman Douglas' school resource officer was carrying a handgun when the shooting happened last week, but did not discharge his firearm. It's unclear what role he played in the shooting. The sheriff said those details are still being investigated.

Also Wednesday outside Stoneman Douglas, as the clock neared the time marking an exact week since Cruz opened fire, about 2,000 teens, teachers and supporters joined hands, reached to the sky and chanted, "Never again. Never Again."

The rally was aimed at showing students they will have the community's support when they return to class next week for the first time since the attack. Many at the rally carried signs demanding stronger gun laws and wore the school's burgundy and silver colors.

Kailey Brown, a 15-year-old freshman who was in the building where the shooting happened, said the rally showed "that we are a community, we are together." She said she would not be scared when school

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reopens next week.

"I am going to come back strong with my friends and show that we love each other so much and we are going to get through this," she said.

Larry Dorce, a 17-year-old junior at nearby J.P. Taravella High, carried a picket sign reading, "Would the gun be worth it if it were your own child?"

"They may be our rivals, our so-called rivals, but they are our sister school and we felt their pain," he said. "The day after the shooting, you could feel the fear in the air (at Taravella) and I never want anyone to feel that again."

Spencer reported from Parkland, Florida. Associated Press writers Freida Frisaro in Miami, Joe Reedy in Tallahassee and Tamara Lush in St. Petersburg contributed to this report.

Procession planned for 'America's Pastor,' Rev. Billy Graham

By RACHEL ZOLL and JONATHAN DREW, Associated Press

MONTREAT, N.C. (AP) — The Rev. Billy Graham, the magnetic, movie-star-handsome preacher who became a singular force in postwar American religious life, a confidant of presidents and the most widely heard Christian evangelist in history, has died. He was 99.

"America's Pastor," as he was dubbed, died at 7:46 a.m. Wednesday at his home, where only an attending nurse was present, said Mark DeMoss, spokesman for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Both the nurse and Graham's longtime personal physician, Dr. Lucian Rice, who arrived about 20 minutes later, said it was "a peaceful passing," DeMoss said. Graham had suffered from cancer, pneumonia and other ailments.

More than anyone else, Graham built evangelicalism into a force that rivaled liberal Protestantism and Roman Catholicism in the U.S. His leadership summits and crusades in more than 185 countries and territories forged powerful global links among conservative Christians and threw a lifeline to believers in the communist bloc.

Tributes to Graham poured in from major leaders, with President Donald Trump tweeting: "The GREAT Billy Graham is dead. There was nobody like him! He will be missed by Christians and all religions. A very special man." Former President Barack Obama said Graham "gave hope and guidance to generations of Americans."

A tall, striking man with thick, swept-back hair, stark blue eyes and a firm jaw, Graham was a commanding presence in the pulpit, with a powerful baritone voice.

"The Bible says," was his catchphrase. His unquestioning belief in Scripture turned the Gospel into a "rapier" in his hands, he said.

Graham reached multitudes around the globe through public appearances and his pioneering use of prime-time telecasts, network radio, daily newspaper columns, evangelistic films and satellite TV hookups.

By his final crusade in 2005 in New York City, he had preached in person to more than 210 million people worldwide. No evangelist is expected to have his level of influence again.

"William Franklin Graham Jr. can safely be regarded as the best who ever lived at what he did," said William Martin, author of the Graham biography "A Prophet With Honor."

Graham's body was moved Wednesday from his home in Montreat to Asheville, where a funeral home is handling the arrangements, DeMoss said. His body will be taken from Asheville to Charlotte on Saturday in a procession expected to take 3 ½ hours and ending at the Billy Graham Museum and Library. He will lie in repose Monday and Tuesday in the Charlotte house where he grew up, which was moved from its original location to the grounds of the Graham library. A private funeral for Graham will be held on Friday, March 2, in a tent at the library site and he will be buried next to his wife there, DeMoss said. Invitations to the funeral will be extended to President Donald Trump and former presidents, DeMoss said.

DeMoss said Graham spent his final months in and out of consciousness. He said Graham didn't take any phone calls or entertain guests. DeMoss quoted Dr. Rice as saying, "He just wore out."

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Graham was a counselor to U.S. presidents of both parties from Dwight Eisenhower to George W. Bush. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan gave him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor. When the Billy Graham Museum and Library was dedicated in 2007 in Charlotte, North Carolina, George H.W. Bush, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton attended.

"When he prays with you in the Oval Office or upstairs in the White House, you feel he's praying for you, not the president," Clinton said at the ceremony.

Born Nov. 7, 1918, on his family's dairy farm near Charlotte, Graham came from a fundamentalist background that expected true Bible-believers to stay clear of Christians with even the most minor differences over Scripture. But he came to reject that view for a more ecumenical approach.

Ordained a Southern Baptist, he later joined a then-emerging movement called New Evangelicalism that abandoned the narrowness of fundamentalism. Fundamentalists excoriated him for his new direction and broke with him when he agreed to work with more liberal Christians in the 1950s.

Graham stood fast.

"The ecumenical movement has broadened my viewpoint and I recognize now that God has his people in all churches," he said in the early 1950s.

In 1957, he said, "I intend to go anywhere, sponsored by anybody, to preach the Gospel of Christ."

His approach helped evangelicals gain the influence they have today.

Graham's path began taking shape at age 16, when the Presbyterian-reared farmboy committed himself to Christ at a tent revival.

"I did not feel any special emotion," he wrote in his 1997 autobiography, "Just As I Am." "I simply felt at peace," and thereafter, "the world looked different."

After high school, he enrolled at the fundamentalist Bob Jones College but found the school stifling and transferred to Florida Bible Institute in Tampa. There, he practiced sermonizing in a swamp, preaching to birds and alligators before tryouts with small churches.

He still wasn't convinced he should be a preacher until a soul-searching, late-night ramble on a golf course.

"I finally gave in while pacing at midnight on the 18th hole," he said. "All right, Lord," I said, "If you want me, you've got me."

Graham went on to study at Wheaton College, a prominent Christian liberal arts school in Illinois, where he met fellow student Ruth Bell, who had been raised in China where her father had been a Presbyterian medical missionary.

The two married in 1943, and he planned to become an Army chaplain. But he fell seriously ill, and by the time he recovered and could start the chaplain training program, World War II was nearly over.

Instead, he took a job organizing meetings in the U.S. and Europe with Youth for Christ, a group he helped found. He stood out for his loud ties and suits, and his rapid delivery and swinging arms won him the nickname "the Preaching Windmill."

A 1949 Los Angeles revival turned Graham into evangelism's rising star. Held in a tent dubbed the "Canvas Cathedral," the gathering had been drawing adequate but not spectacular crowds until one night when reporters and photographers descended.

When Graham asked them why, a reporter said that publisher William Randolph Hearst had ordered his papers to hype Graham. Graham said he never found out why.

Over the next decade, his huge crusades in England and New York catapulted him to international celebrity. His 12-week London campaign in 1954 defied expectations, drawing more than 2 million people and the respect of the British, many of whom had derided him before his arrival as little more than a slick salesman.

Three years later, he held a crusade in New York's Madison Square Garden that was so popular it was extended from six to 16 weeks, capped off with a rally in Times Square that packed Broadway with more than 100,000 people.

The strain of so much preaching caused the already trim Graham to lose 30 pounds by the time the event ended.

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As the civil rights movement took shape, Graham was no social activist and never joined marches, which led prominent Christians such as theologian Reinhold Niebuhr to condemn him as too moderate.

Still, Graham ended racially segregated seating at his Southern crusades in 1953, a year before the Supreme Court's school integration ruling, and long refused to visit South Africa while its white regime insisted on racially segregated meetings.

In a 2005 interview with The Associated Press, Graham said he regretted that he didn't battle for civil rights more forcefully.

"I think I made a mistake when I didn't go to Selma" with many clergy who joined the Alabama march led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. "I would like to have done more."

Graham more robustly took on the cause of anti-communism, making preaching against the atheist regime part of his sermons for years.

As America's most famous religious leader, he golfed with statesmen and entertainers and dined with royalty. Graham's relationships with U.S. presidents became a source of pride for conservative Christians who were often caricatured as backward.

George W. Bush credited Graham with helping him transform himself from carousing oilman to born-again Christian family man.

Graham's White House ties proved problematic when his close friend Richard Nixon resigned in the Watergate scandal, leaving Graham devastated and baffled. He resolved to take a lower profile in the political world, going as far as discouraging the Rev. Jerry Falwell, a founder of the Moral Majority, from mixing religion and politics.

"Evangelicals can't be closely identified with any particular party or person. We have to stand in the middle, to preach to all the people, right and left," Graham said in 1981, according to Time magazine. "I haven't been faithful to my own advice in the past. I will in the future."

Yet, during the 2012 White House campaign, with Graham mostly confined to his North Carolina home, he all but endorsed Republican Mitt Romney. And the evangelist's ministry took out full-page ads in support of a ballot measure that would ban gay marriage.

Some critics on social media faulted Graham for that stance Wednesday, saying his position had harmed gay rights.

Graham's son the Rev. Franklin Graham, who runs the ministry, said his father viewed gay marriage as a moral, not a political, issue.

Graham's integrity was credited with salvaging the reputation of broadcast evangelism in the dark days of the late 1980s, after scandals befell TV preachers Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker.

He resolved early on never to be alone with a woman other than his wife. Instead of taking a share of the "love offerings" at his crusades, he drew a modest salary from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

His ministry was governed by an independent board that included successful Christian businessmen and other professionals — a stark departure from the widespread evangelical practice of packing boards with relatives and yes-men.

"Why, I could make a quarter of a million dollars a year in this field or in Hollywood if I wanted to," Graham said. "The offers I've had from Hollywood studios are amazing. But I just laughed. I told them I was staying with God."

He was on the road for months at a time, leaving Ruth at their mountainside home in Montreat to raise their five children: Franklin, Virginia ("Gigi"), Anne, Ruth and Nelson ("Ned").

Anne Graham Lotz said her mother was effectively "a single parent." Ruth sometimes grew so lonely when Billy was traveling that she slept with his tweed jacket for comfort. But she said, "I'd rather have a little of Bill than a lot of any other man."

She died in 2007 at age 87.

"I will miss her terribly," Billy Graham said, "and look forward even more to the day I can join her in heaven."

Lotz said in a statement Wednesday that she remembers her father's personal side, the man "who was always a farmer at heart. Who loved his dogs and his cat. Who followed the weather patterns almost as

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closely as he did world events. Who wore old blue jeans, comfortable sweaters, and a baseball cap. Who loved lukewarm coffee, sweet ice tea, one scoop of ice cream, and a plain hamburger from McDonald's."

In his later years, Graham visited communist Eastern Europe and increasingly appealed for world peace. He opened a 1983 convention of evangelists from 140 nations by urging the elimination of nuclear and biological weapons.

He told audiences in Czechoslovakia that "we must do all we can to preserve life and avoid war," although he opposed unilateral disarmament. In 1982, he went to Moscow to preach and attend a conference on world peace.

During that visit, he said he saw no signs of Soviet religious persecution, a misguided attempt at diplomacy that brought scathing criticism from author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, among others.

Graham's relationship with Nixon became an issue once again when tapes released in 2002 caught the preacher telling the president that Jews "don't know how I really feel about what they're doing to this country."

Graham apologized, saying he didn't recall ever having such feelings and asking the Jewish community to consider his actions above his words.

In 1995, his son Franklin was named the ministry's leader.

Along with many other honors, Graham received the \$1 million Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in 1982 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1996.

"I have been asked, 'What is the secret?'" Graham had said of his preaching. "Is it showmanship, organization or what? The secret of my work is God. I would be nothing without him."

Online: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association: <http://www.billygraham.org>

Billy Graham Center archives: <http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/archhp1.html>

Zoll reported from New York. Retired Associated Press Religion Writer Richard N. Ostling contributed to this report.

Oversight committee wants to look at Pruitt's travel records

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Republican-led congressional committee is demanding records related to premium-class flights taken by Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt.

House Oversight Chairman Trey Gowdy issued a letter to Pruitt this week seeking an accounting of all flights taken by the EPA administrator over the last year and whether the ticket was coach, business or first class. Pruitt defended his use of premium-class airfare in media interviews earlier this month, saying security concerns were raised after unpleasant interactions with other passengers.

The South Carolina Republican's letter sent Tuesday specifically cites the evolving explanations of EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox, who initially told reporters that Pruitt had a "blanket waiver" to fly first class before then saying separate waiver had been granted by ethics officials for each flight. Federal employees are typically supposed to fly coach, and travel rules such bar blanket waivers.

"We will respond to Chairman Gowdy through the proper channel," Wilcox said Wednesday.

Pruitt, the former GOP attorney general of Oklahoma, has been under increasing scrutiny for his jet setting since his appointment by President Donald Trump last year. Records show Pruitt's airfare is often several times more expensive than that of aides booked on the same flights.

Gowdy's letter says the requested records are to be provided to his committee by March 6.

"Federal regulations require government travelers to obtain approval or authorization from their agency to use accommodations other than coach-class when traveling on official business," Gowdy wrote. "Clearly, federal regulations prohibit a blanket waiver to fly first class except to accommodate disabilities or special needs."

Pruitt said earlier this month he had some "incidents" on flights that necessitated his need for first-class seats. EPA has refused requests from The Associated Press to provide details of those incidents.

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"We live in a very toxic environment politically, particularly around issues of the environment," Pruitt said in an interview with a New Hampshire newspaper. "We've reached the point where there's not much civility in the marketplace and it's created, you know, it's created some issues and the (security) detail, the level of protection is determined by the level of threat."

Pruitt is the first EPA administrator to have a 24-hour security detail, even inside the agency's secured headquarters in Washington. He has also taken other security precautions, including the addition of a \$25,000 soundproof "privacy booth" inside his office to prevent eavesdropping on his phone calls and spending \$3,000 to have his office swept for hidden listening devices.

Pruitt has denied he played any role in purchasing the premium-class tickets, saying his chief of staff and EPA security had made those decisions.

Federal regulations allow government travelers to fly business class or first class when no cheaper options are "reasonably available" or if there are exceptional security circumstances. However, past federal audits have found that those rules have been routinely violated by high-ranking government officials under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Pruitt's frequent government-funded travel, which records show has often included weekend layovers in his home state of Oklahoma, is already under review by EPA's internal watchdog.

The use of luxury air travel by members of Trump's Cabinet has been attracting attention for months. Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price was forced to resign in September following media reports he spent at least \$400,000 in taxpayer funds on private jets for himself and his staff.

A report recently released by the inspector general at the Department of Veterans Affairs found that Secretary David Shulkin and his staff made "false representations" to justify his wife accompanying him at taxpayer expense on an 11-day European trip that mixed business and sightseeing.

Follow AP environmental writer Michael Biesecker at <http://Twitter.com/mbieseck>

Pennsylvania congressional map battle lands in Supreme Court

By MARK SCOLFORO, Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — A request by Republican leaders in the Pennsylvania Legislature to stop a new congressional map from being implemented is now in the hands of the nation's highest court.

The filing made late Wednesday asked Justice Samuel Alito to intervene, saying the state Supreme Court overstepped its authority in imposing a new map.

More litigation may follow, as Republicans are considering a separate legal challenge in federal court in Harrisburg this week.

The state Supreme Court last month threw out a Republican-crafted map that was considered among the nation's most gerrymandered, saying the 2011 plan violated the state constitution's guarantee of free and equal elections.

The new map the state justices announced Monday is widely viewed as giving Democrats an edge as they seek to recapture enough U.S. House seats to reclaim the majority.

House Speaker Mike Turzai and Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati said the state's highest court made an unprecedented decision.

"The Pennsylvania Supreme Court conspicuously seized the redistricting process and prevented any meaningful ability for the Legislature to enact a remedial map to ensure a court drawn map," they wrote in a filing made electronically after business hours.

The challenge adds uncertainty as candidates are preparing to circulate nominating petitions to get their names on the May primary ballot.

A spokesman for Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf, responding to the lawmakers' filing, said Wolf was "focused on making sure the Department of State is fully complying with the court's order by updating their systems and assisting candidates, county election officials and voters preparing for the primary election."

It is the third time in four months that Turzai and Scarnati have asked the U.S. Supreme Court to put a

halt to litigation over the 2011 map they took leading roles in creating.

In November, Alito turned down a request for a stay of a federal lawsuit, a case that Turzai and Scarnati won in January.

On Feb. 5, Alito rejected a request from Turzai and Scarnati to halt a Jan. 22 order from the state Supreme Court that gave the Republican leaders two weeks to propose a map that would be supported by Wolf and until last week to suggest a new map to the court.

Turzai and Scarnati argued that the state's high court gave them scant time to propose their own map after throwing out the 2011 version, ensuring "that its desired plan to draft the new map would be successful." As evidence of a "preordained plan," they cited comments critical of gerrymandering made by Justice David Wecht during his 2015 campaign for the court.

"The court's process was entirely closed," they told Alito. "It did not allow the parties the opportunity to provide any comment to the proposed map, inquire on why certain subdivisions were split and whether it was to meet population equality, or further evaluate whether partisan intent played any role in the drafting."

As a sign of the litigation's potential impact on national politics, President Donald Trump on Tuesday urged Republicans to press their challenge of the map to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"Your Original was correct! Don't let the Dems take elections away from you so that they can raise taxes & waste money!" Trump tweeted.

The five Democrats on the state Supreme Court sided with Democratic voters who challenged the map, although one of the Democratic justices, Max Baer, has pointedly opposed the compressed timetable.

Republicans who controlled the Legislature and the governor's office after the 2010 census crafted the now-invalidated map to help elect Republicans. They succeeded in that aim: Republicans won 13 of 18 seats in three straight elections even though Pennsylvania's registered Democratic voters outnumber Republicans.

An analysis conducted through PlanScore.org concluded the court's redrawn map eliminates "much of the partisan skew" favoring Republicans on the old GOP-drawn map, but not all of it.

Congressional candidates have from Feb. 27 to March 20 to collect and submit enough signatures to get on the ballot, and the new maps have candidates and would-be candidates scrambling to decide whether to jump in. Five incumbents are not seeking another term and a sixth has resigned, an unusually large number of openings.

Angry teens swarm into Florida Capitol; demand new gun laws

By **BRENDAN FARRINGTON, GARY FINEOUT and TAMARA LUSH, Associated Press**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A week after a shooter slaughtered 17 people in a Florida high school, thousands of protesters, including many angry teenagers, swarmed into the state Capitol on Wednesday, calling for changes to gun laws, a ban on assault-type weapons and improved care for the mentally ill.

The normally staid Florida Statehouse filled with students, among them more than 100 survivors of the Feb. 14 attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, on the edge of the Everglades. They held signs, chanted slogans and burst into lawmakers' offices demanding to be heard.

The teens were welcomed into the gun-friendly halls of power, but the students' top goal — a ban on assault-style rifles such as the weapon used in the massacre — was taken off the table a day earlier, although more limited measures are still possible.

Many protesters complained that lawmakers were not serious about reform, and they said they would oppose in future elections any legislator who accepts campaign contributions from the National Rifle Association.

"We've spoke to only a few legislators and ... the most we've gotten out of them is, 'We'll keep you in our thoughts. You are so strong. You are so powerful,'" said Delaney Tarr, a senior at the high school. "We know what we want. We want gun reform. We want commonsense gun laws. ... We want change."

She added: "We've had enough of thoughts and prayers. If you supported us, you would have made a change long ago. So this is to every lawmaker out there: No longer can you take money from the NRA. We are coming after you. We are coming after every single one of you, demanding that you take action."

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Outside the building, the crowd burst into chants of "Vote them out!" as speakers called for the removal of Republican lawmakers who refuse to address gun control issues. One sign read, "Remember the men who value the NRA over children's lives" and then listed Republicans in Florida's congressional delegation. Other signs said, "Kill the NRA, not our kids" and "These kids are braver than the GOP."

About 30 people left an anti-gun rally outside Florida's Old Capitol and began a sit-in protest at the office of four House Republican leaders, demanding a conversation about gun legislation.

"They're not speaking to us right now. We only asked for five minutes and so we're just sitting until they speak," Tyrah Williams, a 15-year-old sophomore at Leon High School, which is within walking distance of the Capitol.

In Washington, students and parents delivered emotional appeals to President Donald Trump to act on school safety and guns. The president promised to be "very strong on background checks," adding that "we're going to do plenty of other things."

And at a news conference Wednesday, Broward County, Florida, Sheriff Scott Israel ordered all deputies who qualify to begin carrying rifles on school grounds. The rifles will be locked in patrol cars when not in use until the agency secures gun lockers and lockers, he said.

"We need to be able to defeat any threat that comes into campus," Israel said.

The sheriff said the school superintendent fully supported his decision.

Stoneman Douglas' school resource office was carrying a weapon when the shooting happened last week, but did not discharge his firearm. It's unclear what role he played in the shooting. The sheriff said those details are still being investigated.

At a town hall held by CNN in Sunrise, Florida, on Wednesday night, thousands of angry students, teachers and parents booed Republican Sen. Marco Rubio when he indicated that he would not support an assault-weapons ban and applauded Dem. Rep. Bill Nelson when he pushed Rubio to work on a bill that they both could support. They also booed a spokeswoman from the NRA when she said the answer was not to ban weapons but to ensure they stay out of the hands of the mentally ill.

Also Wednesday, teens in at least a dozen South Florida schools walked out of class to protest gun violence and commemorate the shooting victims. About 2,000 students, parents, teachers and supporters held hands and chanted outside the Parkland campus.

Megan Mui, a 15-year-old, walked 2 ½ hours from her school to Stoneman Douglas.

"I want to show my support for the changes we need to make so this never happens again," she said, adding that she would like to see a ban on weapons like the AR-15. "They should be strictly for military" purposes.

The suspect, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, has been jailed on 17 counts of murder. Defense attorneys, state records and people who knew him indicate that he displayed behavioral troubles for years, including getting kicked out of the Parkland school. He owned a collection of weapons.

"How is it possible that this boy that we all knew was clearly disturbed was able to get an assault rifle, military grade, and come to our school and try to kill us?" one 16-year-old student asked the president of the state Senate, Joe Negron.

Negron did not answer directly. "That's an issue that we're reviewing," he said.

When another lawmaker said he supported raising the age to buy assault-style weapons to 21 from 18, the students broke into applause.

Florida lawmakers have rebuffed gun restrictions since Republicans took control of both the governor's office and the Legislature in 1999.

Saying the tragedy at the high school was "completely unavoidable," Republican legislative leaders say they will consider legislation that will likely call for raising the age limit to purchase a rifle in Florida and increasing funding for mental health programs and school-resource officers, the police assigned to specific schools.

Lawmakers are also considering a program promoted by one Florida sheriff that calls for deputizing someone to carry a weapon on campus. Legislators may also enact a waiting period for rifle purchases.

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"I am extremely, extremely angry and sad," 16-year-old student Alfonso Calderon said at a news conference at the Statehouse after meeting with lawmakers. "I don't know if I will have faith in my state and local government anymore."

He added, "People are losing their lives and it's still not being taken seriously."

This story has been edited to correct the name of the school to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, instead of Marjorie.

Associated Press writers Terry Spencer and Kelli Kennedy in Parkland, Freida Frisaro in Miami, Joe Reedy in Tallahassee and Tamara Lush in St. Petersburg contributed to this report.

Billy Graham went from tent revivals to the White House

By RACHEL ZOLL and JONATHAN DREW, Associated Press

MONTREAT, N.C. (AP) — As a young man, he practiced his sermons by preaching to the alligators and birds in the swamp. At his height years later, he was bringing the word of God into living rooms around the globe via TV and dispensing spiritual counsel — and political advice — to U.S. presidents.

The Rev. Billy Graham, dubbed "America's Pastor" and the "Protestant Pope," died Wednesday at his North Carolina home at age 99 after achieving a level of influence and reach no other evangelist is likely ever to match.

More than anyone else, the magnetic, Hollywood-handsome Graham built evangelicalism into a force that rivaled liberal Protestantism and Roman Catholicism in the United States.

The North Carolina-born Graham transformed the tent revival into an event that filled football arenas, and reached the masses by making pioneering use of television in prosperous postwar America. By his final crusade in 2005, he had preached in person to more than 210 million people worldwide.

All told, he was the most widely heard Christian evangelist in modern history.

"Graham is a major historical figure, not merely to American evangelicals, but to American Christianity in general," said Bill Leonard, a professor at Wake Forest University Divinity School in North Carolina. Graham was "the closest thing to a national Protestant chaplain that the U.S. has ever had."

A tall figure with swept-back hair, blue eyes and a strong jaw, Graham was a commanding presence in the pulpit with a powerful baritone voice. His catchphrase: "The Bible says ..."

Despite his international renown, he would be the first to say his message was not complex or unique. But he won over audiences with his friendliness, humility and unyielding religious conviction.

He had an especially strong influence on the religion and spirituality of American presidents, starting with Dwight Eisenhower. George W. Bush credited Graham with helping him transform himself from carousing, hard-drinking oilman to born-again Christian family man.

His influence reached beyond the White House. He delivered poignant remarks about the nation's wounds in the aftermath of Sept. 11 during a message from Washington National Cathedral three days after the attacks. He met with boxer Muhammad Ali in 1979 to talk about religion. He showed up in hurricane-ravaged South Carolina in the 1980s and delivered impromptu sermons from the back of a pickup truck to weary storm victims.

In the political arena, his organization took out full-page ads in support of a ballot measure that would ban gay marriage. Critics blasted Graham on social media on Wednesday for his stance on gay rights.

Graham wasn't always a polished presence in the pulpit. After World War II, as an evangelist in the U.S. and Europe with Youth for Christ, he was dubbed "the Preaching Windmill" for his arm-swinging and rapid-fire speech.

His first meeting with a U.S. president, Harry Truman, was a disaster. Wearing a pastel suit and loud tie that he would later say made him look like a vaudeville performer, the preacher, unfamiliar with protocol, told reporters what he had discussed with Truman, then posed for photos.

But those were early stumbles on his path to fame and influence.

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His first White House visit with Lyndon Johnson, scheduled to last only minutes, stretched to several hours. He urged Gerald Ford to pardon Richard Nixon and supported Jimmy Carter on the SALT disarmament treaty. He stayed at the White House with George H.W. Bush on the eve of the first Persian Gulf War.

His presidential ties proved problematic when his close friend Nixon resigned in the Watergate scandal in 1974, leaving Graham devastated, embarrassed and baffled.

Later, tapes released in 2002 caught the preacher telling Nixon that Jews "don't know how I really feel about what they're doing to this country."

Graham apologized, saying he didn't recall ever having such feelings. He asked the Jewish community to consider his actions instead of his words.

At the height of his career, he would be on the road for months at a time. The strain of so much preaching caused the already trim Graham to lose as much as 30 pounds by the time one of his crusades ended.

His wife, Ruth, mostly stayed behind at their mountainside home in Montreat to raise their five children: Franklin, Virginia ("Gigi"), Anne, Ruth and Nelson ("Ned"). Ruth sometimes grew so lonely when Billy was traveling that she slept with his tweed jacket for comfort. But she said, "I'd rather have a little of Bill than a lot of any other man."

Beyond Graham's TV appearances and speaking engagements, he reached multitudes through network radio, including "The Hour of Decision," film and newspapers.

One of Graham's breakthrough films was "The Restless Ones," made in the 1960s, about morally adrift teens in Southern California who found the strength to withstand temptation after attending a Billy Graham crusade.

In the 1950s he created a syndicated newspaper column, "My Answer," which at its height reached tens of millions of readers.

Early on, he took up the cause of fighting communism, preaching against its atheistic evils. But he was much less robust in his support for civil rights and did not join his fellow clergymen in the movement's marches, a position he later said he regretted.

"I think I made a mistake when I didn't go to Selma" to join the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., he said in a 2005 interview. "I would like to have done more."

Still, Graham ended racially segregated seating at his Southern crusades in 1953, a year before the Supreme Court's school integration ruling, and long refused to visit South Africa while its white regime insisted on separating the races at meetings.

Graham's integrity lifted him through the dark days of the late 1980s, after scandals befell TV preachers Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker.

Graham had resolved early on never to be alone with a woman other than his wife. Instead of taking a share of the offerings at his crusades, he drew a modest salary from his ministry, which was governed by an independent board, instead of by friends and relatives.

"Why, I could make a quarter of a million dollars a year in this field or in Hollywood if I wanted to," Graham once said. "The offers I've had from Hollywood studios are amazing. But I just laughed. I told them I was staying with God."

Later in his career, Graham visited communist Eastern Europe. Increasingly, he appealed for world peace.

William Franklin Graham Jr. was born on Nov. 7, 1918, on a rural dairy farm near Charlotte. His path began taking shape at age 16, when the Presbyterian-reared teenager committed himself to Christ at a tent revival.

After high school, he enrolled at the fundamentalist Bob Jones College, then transferred to Florida Bible Institute in Tampa. There, he practiced his sermonizing in a swamp.

He still wasn't convinced he should be a preacher until a soul-searching, late-night ramble on a golf course.

"I finally gave in while pacing at midnight on the 18th hole," he said. "All right, Lord, I said, 'If you want me, you've got me.'"

A 1949 Los Angeles revival in a tent dubbed the "Canvas Cathedral" turned Graham into evangelism's rising star. Legendary publisher William Randolph Hearst had ordered his papers to hype Graham, though the evangelist said he never learned why.

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He later embarked on expectation-defying crusades in London and New York, soon becoming a global voice for Christianity.

Health problems gradually slowed Graham. In 1995 his son William Franklin Graham III, then 43, was designated the ministry's leader.

Billy Graham's wife died in 2007 at age 87. Graham will be buried next to her at the Billy Graham Museum and Library in Charlotte. There was no immediate word on other funeral arrangements.

Online: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association: <http://www.billygraham.org>
Billy Graham Center archives: <http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/archhp1.html>

Zoll reported from New York. Retired Associated Press Religion Writer Richard N. Ostling contributed to this report.

This story has been amended to delete a reference to Graham baptizing Eisenhower at the White House because it could not be verified.

The perils of live microphones tripping up NBC's Olympics

By DAVID BAUDER, AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Every two years, a miracle of technology unfolds: televising and streaming an Olympics with miles of cable, hundreds of cameras and producers who make split-second decisions on which pictures to beam halfway around the world.

So it's with a certain irony that when NBC has had problems in Pyeongchang, it has all been very simple: one person, one live microphone and some 20 million critics. The network has apologized — or not — for a handful of gaffes seen as insults by South Koreans, by the Dutch, by women athletes, by ski fans.

Live television and the risks that it brings are nothing new. The climate surrounding it is.

"Live TV used to be fleeting," says Brett Kurland, a broadcast professor and director of sports programs at Arizona State University. "Something would happen, and you would either see it or you didn't. Now if you say something that someone doesn't like, they'll cut it into a GIF and post it on the Internet. Before you know it, it blows up on your Twitter feed."

He adds: "Everyone is aware that you're just a screen grab away from infamy."

NBC's first problem came from an unexpected source, an expert on Asia assigned to provide context about the host country during the opening ceremony. Joshua Cooper Ramo has impeccable credentials — educated at the University of Chicago, a former Time magazine foreign editor, now a top executive at former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's consulting firm.

When pictures of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe appeared on the screen, Ramo noted that Japan occupied Korea from 1910 to 1945, "but every Korean will tell you that Japan is a cultural, technological and economic example that has been so important to their own transformation."

That angered many South Koreans who caught wind of Ramo's remark and resented their country's treatment by the occupying force. NBC quickly apologized. Ramo hasn't been heard from since on the network, although NBC said he was not contracted to work beyond the opening ceremony.

NBC has also delved little so far into the culture of South Korea the way it has with other Olympic sites, although a heavy schedule of live events in prime time is a factor, too.

Katie Couric, brought back by NBC for the opening ceremony, was the next to take heat. NBC's telecast of that ceremony wasn't televised in the Netherlands but, again, social media quickly made the Dutch aware of comments she had made.

She was discussing the Dutch tradition of excellence in speedskating, and said it stemmed from skating being an important mode of transportation in Amsterdam when canals freeze and people skate from place to place. That left her open to ridicule by some in the Netherlands, who pointed out that the canals rarely freeze anymore and, besides, they have cars now.

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When a backlash reached the Twitter feed of the Dutch embassy in the United States, Couric tweeted a good-natured apology about having been “on thin ice.”

NBC’s team of ski announcers has had a rough Olympics so far. Former ski champion Bode Miller is on his first Olympic assignment for NBC and his overly technical, bland approach to calling races has left some viewers drowsy.

But it was his sudden foray into gender roles that really caused him trouble.

Commentator Dan Hicks brought up Austrian skier Anna Veith’s serious knee injury when he and Miller were discussing her career decline. Miller suggested another condition — matrimony — may have been to blame. “It’s historically very challenging to race on World Cup with a family or after being married,” he said. “Not to blame the spouses, but I just want to toss that out there, that it could be her husband’s fault.”

The backlash from people who considered the remark sexist was so immediate that Miller apologized on the air barely an hour later. He said it was a failed attempt at humor; his deadpan style had left almost no one suspecting he had been trying to make a joke.

Veith was also central to a serious mistake by Hicks. She was in first place during the super-G competition — apparently, marriage wasn’t hurting her in the Olympics — when Hicks prematurely anointed her the gold medal winner.

After the person considered to be Veith’s last serious contender couldn’t beat her time, Hicks said she was the winner and NBC switched to figure skating. But a longshot contender, Ester Ledecka of the Czech Republic, beat Veith’s time and took gold.

The producers’ decision to move on was defensible; no one really thought Ledecka and some other final skiers had a chance. The mistake was Hicks’ certainty. The announcers sought to explain themselves the next night by describing just how improbable Ledecka’s victory was, but that felt more like an excuse than an attempt at accountability.

While all different, NBC’s problems didn’t stem from attempts to be overly provocative or shocking, unless Miller had motives he wasn’t letting on. Instead, they were misstatements made in front of listeners ready to pounce (the hashtag #nbcfail is a venue for people who want to grumble).

For two weeks, the men and women behind NBC’s microphones command the public’s attention the way very few can anymore in a fragmented society of media consumers. They’re ambassadors for sports that most Americans don’t care about for the three years and 50 weeks between each Winter and each Summer Games.

That provides them with an unparalleled opportunity, and many potential potholes.

More AP Olympics: <https://wintergames.ap.org>

Hospitals overwhelmed by bombing blitz of Damascus suburbs

By PHILIP ISSA and ZEINA KARAM, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Doctors in Syria’s rebel-controlled suburbs of Damascus said Wednesday they were unable to keep up with the staggering number of casualties, amid a ferocious bombing campaign by government forces that has targeted hospitals, apartment blocks and other civilian sites, killing and wounding hundreds of people in recent days.

The bombardment has forced many among the nearly 400,000 residents to sleep in basements and makeshift shelters, and has overwhelmed rescue workers who have spent days digging out survivors from the wreckage of bombed out buildings.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an immediate suspension of “all war activities” in the rebel-held Damascus suburbs known as eastern Ghouta where he said 400,000 people are living “in hell on earth.”

The U.N. chief said a suspension of fighting must allow for humanitarian aid to reach all in need and the evacuation of some 700 people needing urgent medical treatment.

Dr. Waleed Awata described a desperate, chaotic scene at the small hospital where he works as an an-

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esthesiologist in the town of Zamalka, one of a cluster of settlements that make up eastern Ghouta. The facility, with just 17 beds, received 82 patients on Tuesday night alone, he said.

"We had to give them IVs and treat them on the floor," the 44-year-old physician told The Associated Press. He said the bodies of two women and two children killed in Wednesday's shelling were also brought to the hospital.

The hospital was struck Tuesday by barrel bombs — crude, explosives-filled oil drums dropped from helicopters at high altitudes — as well as sporadic artillery fire, Awata said. Like many hospitals in the area, patients had been moved into the basement to shield them from airstrikes. No one was hurt but the hospital's generator, water tanks and several ambulances were damaged.

Another doctor said he, too, was at the hospital where he works in the town of Saqba when it came under attack Tuesday, killing some of the patients and forcing others to be moved to nearby homes because the airstrikes made it too dangerous to take them to other hospitals.

"By God, I am exhausted in every sense of the word," said the physician, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he feared for the safety of relatives in government-controlled areas of Damascus.

The international medical organization Doctors Without Borders said 13 hospitals and clinics that it supports have been damaged or destroyed over the past three days. The International Committee of the Red Cross called for immediate access to tend to the wounded, saying medical personnel in the rebel-held areas were unable to cope amid shortages of medicines and supplies.

Syrian government forces supported by Russian aircraft have shown no signs of letting up their aerial and artillery assault on eastern Ghouta since they stepped up strikes late Sunday as part of a new, determined push to recapture the territory that has been controlled by rebels since 2012.

The U.N. human rights office said in a statement Wednesday that at least 346 people had been killed in eastern Ghouta since the Syrian government and its allies escalated their offensive on the region on Feb. 4. At least 92 of those deaths occurred in just one 13-hour period on Monday, it said, adding that the toll was far from comprehensive, documented in the midst of chaos and destruction. Another 878 people have been wounded, mostly in airstrikes hitting residential areas.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which closely monitors the fighting through activists on the ground, said at least 300 people have been killed since Sunday night alone. The dead included 10 people killed in a new wave of strikes Wednesday on the town of Kafr Batna.

The opposition's Syrian Civil Defense search-and-rescue group, also known as the White Helmets, reported similar numbers, saying government forces targeted the town with airstrikes, artillery fire and barrel bombs.

Photos and video posted by the Syrian Civil Defense and local activist groups showed scenes resembling the aftermath of an earthquake in Kafr Batna and rescuers searching the rubble for survivors. In one video, workers were seen carrying away a man, his hair and clothes covered in dust and debris, blood running down his face. Sirens wailed in the background and people screamed in panic. Photos showed children being treated for wounds at a hospital and bodies shrouded in white lined up alongside makeshift graves.

The doctor in Saqba said he had returned home Tuesday to rest after two back-to-back days of treating the wounded when a barrage of rockets landed in his neighborhood, shaking his apartment and breaking the windows.

Minutes later, the airstrikes began. The first one hit his house, the doctor said, adding that he couldn't see anything through the dust as he called out to his pregnant wife and two young children, ages 2 and 1. Neighbors came to their rescue and helped them evacuate to the basement, where they spent the night. They suffered only superficial wounds.

"I'm one of the fortunate ones. I know that not everyone in my place in Ghouta would have been so lucky," he said.

The U.N.'s regional humanitarian coordinator for Syria, Panos Moumtzis, said he was "alarmed" by the very high number of casualties.

"Ghouta is a 10-mile drive from the hospitals in Damascus and it's heartbreaking to think of children, women, and elderly who are in need, unable to be evacuated, and in a situation of fear, hiding in basements and not being able to go out," he said by phone from Amman, Jordan.

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Paul Donohoe, the Beirut-based media officer for International Rescue Committee, said his group supports five medical facilities in eastern Ghouta that, because of the severity of the bombardment, were only able to treat the most urgent cases. He said more than 700 people, including some with chronic illnesses that need urgent medical evacuation, were trapped.

"People are terrified. ... We need a cease-fire immediately because of the horrible, horrendous number of people who have died so far," he said.

Rebels in eastern Ghouta retaliated by sending mortar shells crashing Wednesday into Damascus, seat of President Bashar Assad's power.

The Russian military is again supporting Assad's forces as it did in the all-out assault on the rebel-held half of Syria's largest city, Aleppo, in late 2016, which drove the rebels from their enclave there. Tens of thousands of civilians were forced to flee their homes, and many have been unable to return. Hundreds more were killed in indiscriminate shelling and bombardment. A subsequent U.N. investigation charged that the campaign amounted to forced displacement of a population and rose to the level of a war crime.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said earlier this week that the assault on Aleppo could serve as a model for the military campaign in eastern Ghouta, which he said was necessary to uproot al-Qaida-linked militants from the area.

On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, rejected allegations from the U.S. and others that the Russian military shares responsibility, along with Assad's forces, for civilian casualties in eastern Ghouta, calling such claims "unfounded."

Associated Press writers Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow and Bassam Hatoum in Beirut contributed to this report.

Much-touted MS-13 sweep keeps even most basic details secret

By TOM HAYS and COLLEEN LONG, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It was a tally so impressive that President Donald Trump touted it at his State of the Union address: Since May, agents cracking down on the violent gangs terrorizing the working-class suburbs of Long Island had swept up 428 gang suspects, including 220 members of the notorious MS-13.

But the sweep, Operation Matador, also has been shrouded in secrecy. Federal and state authorities have declined repeated requests from The Associated Press for even basic information made public in most law enforcement operations, such as the names of those arrested and the crimes they are accused of committing.

They won't divulge their ages, immigration statuses or current whereabouts. And while they say 44 of those arrested have been deported, they refuse to say what happened to the rest, including whether they are even still in custody. They say releasing more details could endanger the suspects and jeopardize ongoing investigations.

The lack of transparency comes amid accusations by immigration rights groups that the government is using unsubstantiated rumors of gang affiliations to detain innocent people. Federal immigration judges have already ordered the release of some detainees arrested on suspicion of being MS-13 members when the government couldn't produce any evidence of gang activity.

Some parents and activists say some of those included in the tally are innocent teenagers who came to the U.S. as unaccompanied minors, spending weeks locked in maximum-security detention centers based on flimsy and false allegations of gang activity. Civil liberties lawyers say that in some cases their alleged "activity" was wearing a black T-shirt or making a hand gesture.

"They said we have a warrant for your arrest and we don't have to explain anything to you now. We will tell you when you come with us," one teenager, who asked not to be named because she is afraid of being deported, told the AP in Spanish. "Later, they told me I had been associated with gangs."

The teenager said she was not a member of MS-13. She said she knew of people in MS-13, as do most people at Brentwood High School, a large school 45 miles east of New York City. Maybe she's talked with

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some of them in the hallway.

Although she was released after two months in detention, she remains worried.

"I can't defend myself," she said. "I can't explain what happened because I don't even know who is accusing me."

Immigration attorney Dawn Guidone said she represented about seven teenagers detained on gang allegations and at least two were deported. One student said all he did was wear blue, the color of the gang. Officials said he was associating with "known gang members."

"But the gang member he was associating with sat next to him in math class," Guidone said. "If that's associating, then I don't know how to even deal with that."

The federal agency leading the crackdown, Homeland Security Investigations, said that of the 428 gang suspects mentioned in the Republican president's speech, 216 faced criminal charges, but it wouldn't say whether those charges had anything to do with gang activity or violence. It said the remaining 212 were detained for suspected immigration law violations but refused to disclose their names, citing privacy concerns.

Suffolk County District Attorney Tim Sini has refused to answer questions about MS-13 arrests for more than a year.

In neighboring Nassau County, prosecutors said they "took down the alleged kingpin of MS-13 for the entire Eastern region of the United States," but they refused to name the suspect, who's awaiting extradition from Maryland. A spokesman for prosecutors said the man's identity is being withheld because an indictment naming several co-defendants is sealed as it pertains to him.

MS-13, or La Mara Salvatrucha, recruits young teenagers from El Salvador and Honduras, though many gang members were born in the U.S. Long Island has a large population of unaccompanied minors from Central America, including many who were fleeing the violence in their home nations.

The gang has been blamed for at least 25 killings since January 2016 across a wide swath of Long Island. And many other people are missing.

In a July visit to Suffolk County, Trump promised his administration would "dismantle, decimate and eradicate" MS-13.

"They're going to jails, and then they're going back to their country, or they're going back to their country period," he said.

Last year, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a class action lawsuit in California claiming some teenagers arrested in the gang crackdown were being wrongly held at detention centers.

A federal judge overseeing the case ruled the plaintiffs deserve prompt hearings and released at least nine. The judge ordered the government to disclose how many were being held. The government has not done so.

Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

Colorado congressman booed as people demand action on guns

By **NICHOLAS RICCARDI**, Associated Press

GREENWOOD VILLAGE, Colo. (AP) — Grumbling and jeers met the request for a moment of silence for the 17 people killed last week in the Florida school shooting.

"Let's do something for them!" one man yelled at the beginning of Republican Rep. Mike Coffman's town hall Tuesday night. Another participant cried out, "We're done with thoughts and prayers!"

Coffman's swing district in the Denver suburbs is all too familiar with mass shootings. A few miles to the northeast of the high school that hosted Tuesday's town hall is the location of the Aurora theater massacre, where 12 people were shot to death in 2012. A few miles to the southwest of the town hall site, just across the district line, is Columbine High School, the site of the 1999 school shooting that killed 13.

In a district that voted for Democrats Barack Obama in 2012 and Hillary Clinton in 2016, Coffman has been a perennial political target for Democrats. He is in his fifth term, but Democrats have not made gun

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control a centerpiece of their campaigns for votes though the electorate is evenly split between Democrats, Republicans and those unaffiliated.

That could change this year. The raw emotions at Coffman's town hall shows how guns have become a volatile issue in an already hyper-charged midterm election, stoking passions that will be difficult for Democrats to contain, and difficult for embattled Republicans like Coffman to defend against.

Patti Seno, 53, broke into tears as she recounted how her husband, a firefighter, was on the scene of the Columbine shooting and an attack at a nearby school in 2013 that killed one student. Her son had planned to see a midnight showing of the new Batman movie the night that the gunman attacked the audience in Aurora. Yet, she told Coffman, she hadn't spoken out until watching students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Florida, campaign for new gun laws.

"I am ashamed, as it took children to shake me from my comfort zone to come forward to say enough is enough," said Seno, a Democrat. "An avalanche is coming to Washington, sir, and it is going to be led by our children."

Coffman has received \$34,000 in contributions from the National Rifle Association, more than any other Colorado member of Congress. Gun control activists, sometimes accompanied by family members of those killed in Aurora, have pushed him for years to back more restrictions. Yet even after the Aurora shooting in 2012, Democrats did not mention gun control in their campaign against Coffman. It barely came up in 2014, either, after two Democratic state legislators were recalled for passing new state gun restrictions.

"The West is different," said Josh Penry, a veteran GOP strategist and Coffman adviser. "There's this basic understanding that Congress passing a lot of laws isn't going to stop evil people from committing evil acts."

Still, two days after the Florida shooting, a potential Democratic challenger to Coffman, Jason Crow — like Coffman, a combat veteran — demanded that Coffman return his NRA donations. That cheered Laura Chapin, a Democratic strategist who's been active in gun issues.

"The massacres are getting bigger and worse," Chapin said. "It would be smart of Democrats to go after Mike Coffman's hypocrisy."

Sharp questions about guns dominated the hourlong town hall. Coffman said he was willing to discuss "reasonable restrictions within the parameters of the Second Amendment," a statement that drew fierce boos from the crowd. He repeatedly declined to back an assault-weapons ban but said he'd consider "red flag" laws that would allow the temporary confiscation of firearms from those judged to be a threat to themselves or others.

He spent much of his time defending some of his previous votes, including for a bill last year to require states to accept concealed-carry permits from other, less-regulated states and another for a bill rolling back an Obama administration rule confiscating guns from people judged not competent enough to manage their Social Security benefits. Coffman contended it was a civil rights issue and noted the American Civil Liberties Union and disability rights groups supported the rollback, a statement that also drew hearty boos.

"I cannot understand how somebody who represented the district that has the Aurora theater in it can say this is a bad idea," Alex Tillman, 48, who works in risk management, told Coffman.

Coffman said was going to meet with school safety and law enforcement officials and suggested the government beef up school security — another statement that infuriated the audience. Asked what he would do if he found his personal principles conflicting with the desires of his constituents, Coffman drew more boos when he said he thought they matched pretty well.

"The angriest voices show up, I get that," Coffman said. "I respect the views of the people here and it's helpful to me, but often times it's not the views of the totality of the district."

___ This story has been corrected to reflect that 12 were killed in the Aurora theater shooting and 13 at Columbine.

State witness turning point in Netanyahu corruption case

By IAN DEITCH, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Now that one of Benjamin Netanyahu's closest confidants has turned state witness, according to Israeli media reports Wednesday, it may mark a turning point for the beleaguered prime minister facing a slew of corruption allegations that could topple him from power.

The testimony by Shlomo Filber, a long-time Netanyahu aide, is the latest in a dizzying series of developments and scandals that have engulfed the prime minister, his family and his inner circle.

Police would not confirm whether Filber would testify against Netanyahu, but all the major Israeli media outlets said a deal to do so had been reached.

Aluf Benn, editor-in-chief of the Haaretz daily, wrote Wednesday that "these are the final days of Benjamin Netanyahu's rule" and that "Netanyahu's leadership has been dealt a harsh blow, apparently a mortal one."

Filber, the former director of the Communications Ministry under Netanyahu, is under arrest on suspicion of promoting regulation worth hundreds of millions of dollars to Israel's Bezeq telecom company. In return, Bezeq's popular news site, Walla, allegedly provided favorable coverage of Netanyahu and his family.

The reports came shortly after another bombshell allegation that a different Netanyahu confidant attempted to bribe a judge in exchange for dropping a corruption case against Netanyahu's wife. Nir Hefetz, a longtime media adviser to Netanyahu and his family, remains in custody.

The prime minister, who held the communications portfolio until last year, has not yet been named a suspect, though he may soon be questioned. Netanyahu has denied all the charges, calling them part of a media-orchestrated witch hunt that has swept up the police and prosecution as well, and has vowed to carry on.

Still, the string of accusations appears to be taking its toll.

Senior Cabinet ministers from Netanyahu's ruling Likud party, who until just recently have marched out dutifully to defend him, have largely gone silent. Netanyahu himself appeared ashen in a video released late Tuesday calling the claims "total madness."

Netanyahu projected business as usual on Wednesday evening.

At a gathering of Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, he spoke about Israel's diplomatic and technological successes as well as regional developments and the threat of "Iran's aggression." He made no mention of his domestic woes in the speech to major American Jewish organizations.

Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, a bitter rival of Netanyahu, told Channel 10 TV "there is no way back" for the premier. "This chapter in the political history of Israel is about to end," he said.

Barak said he closely knows Netanyahu and believes he "understands that this is the end of the story" but will try and postpone the inevitable in different ways.

Other leading Israeli columnists on Wednesday suggested that if Filber told all he knew, Netanyahu was probably more worried about avoiding prison than staying in office.

"When so many dark clouds accumulate in the sky, the chances of rain increase," wrote Nahum Barnea in Yediot Ahronot. "His appearance lent the fight he is waging the dimensions of a Shakespearean tragedy. This isn't the end. It isn't even the beginning of the end. But it cannot have a different end."

Filber is one of the closest people to Netanyahu, a loyal aide dating back to when Netanyahu first took office in 1996. Netanyahu's former chief of staff Ari Harow has also signed a state witness settlement in which he agreed to testify against his former mentor. The collapse of Netanyahu's inner circle has spawned rampant speculation that he may step down in return for a deal that offers him amnesty.

Avi Gabbay, head of Labor Party, said he was preparing for elections.

"The Netanyahu era is over," he said. "These are not easy days. Netanyahu's personal battle for survival has been accompanied by the corrupting of the public service and the harming of the free press."

The latest probes come days after police announced that there was sufficient evidence to indict Netanyahu for bribery, fraud and breach of trust in two separate cases.

Attorney General Avihai Mandelblit, a Netanyahu appointee, will make the final decision on whether to file charges — a process that is expected to take several months.

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Netanyahu is accused of accepting nearly \$300,000 in lavish gifts from Hollywood mogul Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer. In return, police say Netanyahu operated on Milchan's behalf on U.S. visa matters, legislated a tax break and connected him with an Indian businessman.

Police have not commented on what Packer may have received, and Netanyahu has said everything he received were gifts from friends.

In the second case, Netanyahu is accused of offering a newspaper publisher legislation that would weaken his paper's main rival in return for more favorable coverage.

Netanyahu reportedly was recorded asking Arnon Mozes, the publisher of Yediot Ahronot, for positive coverage in exchange for helping to weaken Israel Hayom, a free pro-Netanyahu newspaper that had cut into Yediot's business.

Israel Hayom is financed by Netanyahu's American billionaire friend Sheldon Adelson and largely serves as the prime minister's mouthpiece. Netanyahu has noted that a proposed law to weaken Israel Hayom never passed, and this week said he had even dissolved his coalition and called a new election in 2015 because of his opposition to the proposal.

The attorney general will have to rule on this case as well.

Hefetz, the premier's former media adviser now in custody, is suspected of suggesting, through a middleman, to Judge Hila Gerstel in 2015 that she could be appointed attorney general if she dismissed a pending case against Sara Netanyahu's excessive household spending.

The middleman is also in police custody. The offer never materialized, and Israel's current attorney general recommended last fall indicting Mrs. Netanyahu for graft, fraud and breach of trust for allegedly overspending more than \$100,000 in public funds on private meals at their official residence.

Netanyahu swiftly and angrily denied any suggestion that he made an offer to a potential attorney general as "ludicrous."

To get a ride, Uber says take a walk

By TOM KRISHER, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — The latest variation of an Uber ride will require a short walk.

In eight U.S. cities, the ride-hailing company is rolling out a service called "Express Pool," which links riders in the same area who want to travel to similar destinations. Once linked, riders would need to walk a couple of blocks to be picked up at a common location. They also would be dropped off at a site that would be a short walk from their final destinations.

Depending on time of day and metro area, Express Pool could cost up to 75 percent less than a regular Uber ride and up to half the cost of Uber's current shared-ride service called Pool, said Ethan Stock, the company's product director for shared rides. Pool, which will remain in use, doesn't require any walking. Instead it takes an often circuitous route to pick up riders at their location and drops them at their destination. But that can take longer than Express, which travels a more direct route.

Uber has been testing the service since November in San Francisco and Boston and has found enough ridership to support running it 24 hours per day. Within the next two days, the around-the-clock service will start running in Los Angeles; Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; Miami; San Diego and Denver. More cities will follow, Uber said.

The new service could spell competition for mass transit, but just how much depends on how well it works and how good the mass transit is, said Mark Hallenbeck, director of the Washington State Transportation Center at the University of Washington. If buses or subways are overcrowded and Uber can provide service for a similar price, that will help with mobility.

"If, however, you are cannibalizing transit that's not over-subscribed, then that becomes a bad thing," Hallenbeck said.

Also, if the ride-sharing service pulls people off mass transit and creates more automobile traffic, that will add to congestion, he said.

The service could complement Uber X, the company's door-to-door taxi service — or draw passengers away from it.

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Stock said the system should work well with public transit, providing first-mile and last-mile service for transit riders and by providing service to low passenger volume areas where it's not cost effective for public transit to serve. He also says it will reduce congestion by cutting the number of personal vehicle trips.

Express already has ride-sharing competitors such as Via, which operates in New York, Chicago and Washington, D.C.

Express Pool will have normal-sized cars, at least initially, and optimally will carry a maximum of three passengers so riders aren't crammed into the vehicles. It could be expanded to six-passenger vehicles, Stock said.

It will take one to two minutes for Uber's computers to match a rider to a driver and other riders and select a pick-up point, Stock said.

The lower cost of the service should help Uber grow, Stock said. "More riders can afford to take more trips for more reasons," he said. Already Uber Pool accounts for 20 percent of Uber trips in the cities where it's available.

Book Trump? Interest groups press case at his properties

By TAMI ABDOLLAH and STEPHEN BRAUN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Payday lenders got regulators to rethink rules on how closely to vet borrowers. E-cigarette makers got a delay in federal oversight of many vaping products. Candy makers praised a decision to hold off on more stringent labeling standards. And title insurers declared "victory" for getting changes that benefited them in the tax overhaul.

What do all these American special-interest groups have in common? They were among those that booked meetings, retreats and conferences at hotels and golf resorts owned by President Donald Trump.

While it's impossible to draw a direct link between where groups seeking to influence the Trump administration hold their events and what they received, one thing is certain: Never before in American history have such groups had the opportunity to hold an event at a property owned by the president, paying for event space, rooms and food with money that ultimately heads into the president's pockets.

An Associated Press analysis of the special interests that visited Trump properties in the first year of his presidency found several instances that at least created the appearance of "pay for play." And lobbying experts say as long as the president fails to divest from his businesses and can still profit from such bookings, special interests will take full advantage.

"The name of the game is to have your message heard, and frankly, if you're helping put money in the family pocket, that's a good way of getting heard. And it's legal," said Bob Schneider, a former lobbyist who worked in Washington for 25 years.

"If I were still doing that business, I would run to the Trump Hotel and have every event I could there," Schneider said, "because I can't imagine anyone believing that Donald Trump Jr. doesn't tell his dad what's going on with the business."

Before taking office, Trump made a series of promises to draw a "red line" between his businesses and his administration. They included setting up a trust to hold his assets (which he can still access at any time), handing day-to-day management responsibilities to his two oldest sons and hiring an ethics lawyer to vet business deals. He also pledged to always act "beyond reproach" and never give "even the appearance of a conflict."

In the first year of the Trump presidency, the watchdog group Public Citizen counted at least 19 interest groups that held events at Trump properties, including those representing miners, oil drillers, hedge fund operators, insurers, funeral home directors and commercial real estate investors.

But it's difficult to know exactly how many such meetings were held and how much money those groups spent because, unlike political organizations or campaigns, interest groups are not required to reveal their expenditures at private facilities.

And the Trump Organization declined to even discuss such meetings.

Several special-interest groups contacted by the AP repeatedly said price, location and availability — not

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trying to influence public policy — were their primary reasons for booking with Trump.

Government ethics watchdogs say that while these actions may be legal, they can cause the public to question some of the Trump administration's decisions.

"There's a pretty big difference from lobbying and giving business to the president, which essentially means actually enriching the president," said Noah Bookbinder, executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

"When you have these kinds of business relationships, it creates the risk that the president is instead going to be motivated by what's in his financial interest instead of what's in the best interest of the American people."

A look at several special interests that met at Trump properties, their lobbying priorities, and the real-world results:

BANKERS

Hedge fund managers, bankers and payday lenders have been opening their wallets at Trump properties. In March, the Palm Beach Hedge Fund Association, members of an industry that Trump once said were "getting away with murder" with tax breaks, held a meet-and-greet gathering at his Mar-a-Lago club in town.

A few days later, executives from dozens of banks converged for a three-day conference at the Trump National Doral Miami that was sponsored by a trade magazine. Its panel discussions included one titled "The Trump presidency and what it means for banking."

Next up, a payday lending group will be heading to the Doral in April for its annual conference.

Trump administration goals often align with business groups, but those groups have nevertheless notched significant concessions from lawmakers and regulators in recent months.

Federal regulators recently announced they would reconsider rules requiring payday lenders to make sure potential borrowers can pay back loans. And a law passed late last year will make it harder for consumers to join together to sue their banks.

Also, the tax overhaul left open a loophole for hedge fund operators to claim much of their income as "carried interest" taxed at lower rates than ordinary income. But after Senate questioning, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said last week that he plans to close the loophole.

Money manager Tom Brown, who spoke at the Doral event for bankers, said he didn't believe attendees saw it as an opportunity to curry favor with the Trump administration.

For its part, the Community Financial Services Association, a payday lending group, said it first held an annual meeting at the Doral 16 years ago and added, "We look forward to returning." A board member of the Palm Beach hedge fund group, Jonathan Beaton, said it was a just a social club, not a lobbying organization.

"No one is trying to get to Trump or change policy," he said.

VAPING VICTORY

In July, a Washington-based trade association for the vaping and e-cigarette industry held its annual two-day conference at the Trump International Hotel in Washington. The keynote speaker was Sen. Ron Johnson, a Wisconsin Republican who had just written the Food and Drug Administration asking that it rein in a 2016 rule requiring e-cigarette makers get federal approval to sell the products, something the association says stunts innovation and places heavy costs on small businesses.

Ten days later, the FDA announced that, as part of its efforts to strike the "appropriate balance" between regulation and innovation, manufacturers of e-cigarettes and cigars already on the market would have another four years before they would be required to get agency approval. The delay also applies to regulations on flavored vaping products, which studies show to be especially appealing to young people.

Tony Abboud, executive director of the Vapor Technology Association, said in a statement that it was "overly simplistic" to suggest the July event at Trump's hotel had anything to do with the FDA delay. He said the venue was selected based on budget and proximity to Capitol Hill.

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SWEET SUCCESS

The lobbying group that represents "Big Candy" interests such as Mars and Hershey's held two events at Trump properties in the past two years — at the Doral in Miami in March 2017 and in 2016 at the Trump International Hotel in Washington.

The group appears to have found receptive ears in the administration.

In September, FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb proposed delaying Obama-era rules that would have imposed new labeling standards on candy. An official at the lobbying group, the National Confectioners Association, wrote Gottlieb a congratulatory letter, saying that the delay to January 2020 would "significantly reduce the burden" on the industry.

Christopher Gindlesperger, a spokesman for the group, said the Miami event was booked in 2014, a year before Trump entered the presidential race, and the Washington event in 2015 before Trump became president. He added the group's use of Trump properties was based on its event needs only, adding that its choice of venues is "completely unrelated to our advocacy efforts."

TITLE INSURERS

A trade association for the title insurance industry has spent more than half a million dollars each year over a decade lobbying Congress and the White House. But never before has it had the opportunity to host an event at a property owned by a U.S. president.

In October, the American Land Title Association held a three-day annual conference at Trump National Doral Miami, with rooms advertised to members at the rate of \$279 a night.

Two months later, ALTA wrote about a "significant victory" on its blog. The insurers sell more policies when people buy and sell more homes, but the initial versions of both the Senate and House versions of the tax overhaul would have hurt business by forcing home sellers to hold on to properties longer to claim tax-free capital gains on sales.

The final law cut out those restrictions. Meanwhile, Trump said last month that he would look into another priority for the group, loosening rules on consumer lending.

Representatives for ALTA did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

TRAIN TRAINING

What do rules about training programs for railroad workers have to do with a dinner of sweet corn bisque, saffron paella and roasted rockfish accompanied by Trump wine from his Virginia vineyard and Trump Signature coffee?

Well, maybe nothing, but it's worth watching.

The backstory is that the National Railroad Association doesn't like a 2008 Transportation Department rule requiring what it considers excessive training for railroad workers. It has spent years trying to repeal it, spending \$120,000 last year alone on lobbying on this issue and others.

The Federal Railroad Administration had been authorized by Congress in 2008 to enact training rules, but a final rule had been repeatedly delayed.

In March 2017, the association held a lavish dinner at the Trump International Hotel Washington down the street from the White House. "I am drinking Trump coffee," enthused one guest, Iowa Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley, who posted a photo of the menu on his Instagram account.

The next day U.S. railroad executives and lobbyists fanned out to Capitol offices for their annual "Railroad Day" lobbying rounds.

In December, the Federal Railroad Administration announced a proposal to delay implementation of its training rules for another year.

The association did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

THE POP-IN

In at least one instance, Trump himself stopped by during a corporation's event at the president's exclusive Mar-a-Lago club.

It came in December during the Christmas party for Oxbow Carbon LLC, a Florida-based energy company owned by William Koch, a longtime dues-paying member of Mar-a-Lago and brother of billionaires and conservative activists Charles and David Koch.

Oxbow's main product, petroleum coke, a fuel used in oil refining and often stored in bulk, could be affected by the Trump administration's push to ease air and water pollution regulations.

Oxbow spokesman Brad Goldstein said no business was discussed during Trump's visit to the party and stressed that Koch has long held events at Trump's club.

"This was an event to reward Oxbow employees and the president was just visiting as he has in the past," Goldstein said. "It had nothing to do with public policy."

This story has been corrected to reflect that the National Confectioners Association has met twice at Trump properties in the past two years, not in the past year. The most recent was March 2017 at the Trump National Doral Miami. The group also did not schedule another event at the Trump Washington hotel in September.

Associated Press writer Bernard Condon in New York contributed to this report.

Beyond 'Obamacare': New liberal plan on health care overhaul

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A major liberal policy group is raising the ante on the health care debate with a new plan that builds on Medicare to guarantee coverage for all.

Called "Medicare Extra for All," the proposal to be released Thursday by the Center for American Progress gives politically energized Democrats more options to achieve a long-sought goal.

In a nod to political pragmatism, the plan would preserve a role for employer coverage and for the health insurance industry. Employers and individuals would have a choice of joining Medicare Extra, but it would not be required.

That differs from the more traditional "single-payer" approach advocated by Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, in which the government would hold the reins of the health care system.

Even though the plan has no chance of passing in a Republican-controlled Congress, center president Neera Tanden said, "We think it's time to go bolder."

"There is consensus on the progressive side that universal coverage should be the goal and health care is a right," she added.

Picking up on the leftward shift among Democrats, Republicans are already working up rebuttals. President Donald Trump tweeted earlier this month that "Dems want to greatly raise taxes for really bad and non-personal medical care. No thanks!"

The Center for American Progress is a think tank that was closely aligned with President Barack Obama and 2016 Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. A 2005 proposal from the center foreshadowed Obama's Affordable Care Act.

Medicare Extra would use Medicare's thrifty payment system as a framework to pool working-age people and their families, low-income people now covered by Medicaid, and seniors. A major missing piece: There's no cost estimate for the plan, although its authors say that's in the works.

The proposal comes at a time when polls show intense interest among Democrats and some independents in a government-run system that would guarantee coverage and benefits while reducing the complexity and out-of-pocket costs associated with private insurance. The future of health care is expected to be a defining issue in the 2020 Democratic presidential primaries, and political messages will be tested and honed in this fall's midterm elections.

A nonpartisan expert who independently reviewed the Medicare Extra plan said it could provide Demo-

crats with a middle way to achieve their longstanding goal of coverage for all.

"It's an attempt to capture the enthusiasm for a single-payer system among the Democratic base, but trying to create a more politically and fiscally realistic roadmap," said Larry Levitt of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

To be sure, taxes would rise and the federal government would take on a larger role.

"It is in some ways 'repeal and replace,' but from the left rather than the right," Levitt added.

Medicare Extra envisions a complex transition that would take the better part of a decade. Among its major elements:

—All U.S. citizens and lawful residents would be automatically eligible for coverage.

—Preventive care, treatment for chronic disease, and generic prescription drugs would be free. Dental, vision and hearing services would be included.

—Low-income people would pay no premiums or copays. Premiums and cost-sharing would be determined according to income for everyone else.

—Employers would have the option of maintaining their own plans or joining Medicare Extra. Workers could pick the government plan over their employer's. The proposal would preserve the tax-free status of employer-provided health care, subject to a limit.

—Seniors with private Medicare Advantage insurance plans through Medicare would be able to keep similar coverage, although the program would be redesigned and called "Medicare Choice." Seniors would gain coverage for vision, dental and hearing services not now provided by Medicare. Long-term care services would be covered.

—Government would negotiate prices for prescription drugs, medical devices and medical equipment.

Although costs and financing are not spelled out in the proposal, its authors acknowledge significant tax increases would be required. Options include rolling back some of the recently enacted GOP tax cuts for corporations and upper-income people, raising Medicare taxes on upper-income earners, and higher taxes on tobacco and sugary soft drinks.

Online:

Center for American Progress proposal: <https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=447095>

Asian stocks lower after Fed report renews bond yield fears

By KELVIN CHAN, AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Most Asian stock indexes fell Thursday, tracking Wall Street's decline after the latest Fed report rekindled fears about inflation and rising bond yields.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 index sank 1.2 percent to 21,713.20 and South Korea's Kospi shed 0.5 percent to 2,417.24. Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 1.1 percent to 31,076.62 but the Shanghai Composite rose 1.6 percent to 3,250.64, fueled by pent-up demand from investors in mainland China, where markets reopened after a weeklong holiday. Australia's S&P ASX 200 dipped 0.1 percent to 5,938.60.

MEETING MINUTES: The Federal Reserve's minutes from its most recent policy meeting indicated bullish sentiment among policymakers about the outlook for U.S. and global economic growth, reinforcing expectations for further interest rate rises this year. Wall Street initially welcomed the report but soon enough U.S. Treasury yields spiked to their highest level in four years, snuffing out the market rally in a sign of renewed worries about rising inflation. Higher yields hurt stock prices by making bonds more attractive than equities.

MARKET VIEW: "The Fed minutes for the January meeting seem to have set off another (so far) minor explosion in markets," Michael Every, Asia strategist at Rabobank, said in a commentary.

WALL STREET: Major U.S. benchmarks ended lower. The Standard & Poor's 500 index fell 0.5 percent to 2,701.33. The Dow Jones industrial average lost 0.7 percent to 24,797.78. The Nasdaq gave up 0.2 percent to 7,218.23.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude fell 71 cents to \$60.97 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York

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Mercantile Exchange. The contract fell 11 cents to settle at \$61.68 per barrel on Thursday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, lost 56 cents to \$64.86 per barrel in London.

CURRENCIES: The dollar weakened to 107.32 yen from 107.77 yen in late trading Wednesday. The euro slipped to \$1.2277 from \$1.2284.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Feb. 22, the 53rd day of 2018. There are 312 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 22, 1732 (New Style date), the first president of the United States, George Washington, was born in Westmoreland County in the Virginia Colony.

On this date:

In 1630, English colonists in the Massachusetts Bay Colony first sampled popcorn brought to them by a Native American named Quadequina for their Thanksgiving celebration.

In 1862, Jefferson Davis, already the provisional president of the Confederacy, was inaugurated for a six-year term following his election in November 1861.

In 1892, "Lady Windermere's Fan" by Oscar Wilde was first performed at London's St. James' Theater.

In 1909, the Great White Fleet, a naval task force sent on a round-the-world voyage by President Theodore Roosevelt, returned after more than a year at sea.

In 1924, President Calvin Coolidge delivered the first radio broadcast from the White House as he addressed the country over 42 stations.

In 1935, it became illegal for airplanes to fly over the White House.

In 1943, Pan Am Flight 9035, a Boeing 314 flying boat, crashed while attempting to land in Lisbon, Portugal. Twenty-five people were killed; 14 survived, including actress-singer Jane Froman.

In 1959, the inaugural Daytona 500 race was held; although Johnny Beauchamp was initially declared the winner, the victory was later awarded to Lee Petty.

In 1967, more than 25,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese troops launched Operation Junction City, aimed at smashing a Vietcong stronghold near the Cambodian border. (Although the communists were driven out, they later returned.)

In 1974, Pakistan officially recognized Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan).

In 1980, the "Miracle on Ice" took place in Lake Placid, New York, as the United States Olympic hockey team upset the Soviets, 4-3. (The U.S. team went on to win the gold medal.)

In 1997, scientists in Scotland announced they had succeeded in cloning an adult mammal, producing a lamb named "Dolly." (Dolly, however, was later put down after a short life marred by premature aging and disease.)

Ten years ago: Turkish troops crossed into northern Iraq in their first major ground incursion against Kurdish rebel bases in nearly a decade. Singer-actress Jennifer Lopez gave birth to twins, a girl and a boy. Civil rights activist Johnnie Carr died in Montgomery, Alabama, at age 97.

Five years ago: The Justice Department joined a lawsuit against disgraced cyclist Lance Armstrong alleging the former seven-time Tour de France champion had concealed his use of performance-enhancing drugs and defrauded his longtime sponsor, the U.S. Postal Service. (The case is headed to trial.)

One year ago: The Trump administration lifted federal guidelines that said transgender students should be allowed to use public school bathrooms and locker rooms matching their chosen gender identity. Most of the Dakota Access pipeline opponents abandoned their protest camp ahead of a government deadline to get off the federal land. A shooting at a bar in Olathe (oh-LAY'-thuh), Kansas, left one man dead and two others wounded; witnesses said a man yelled, "Get out of my country" before opening fire on two Indian nationals who worked as engineers at GPS-maker Garmin. (A suspect has been charged with first-degree murder and first-degree attempted murder, as well as federal hate crime charges.)

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Today's Birthdays: Actor Paul Dooley is 90. Actor James Hong is 89. Actor John Ashton is 70. Actress Miou-Miou is 68. Actress Julie Walters is 68. Basketball Hall of Famer Julius Erving is 68. Actress Ellen Greene is 67. Former Sen. Bill Frist, R-Tenn., is 66. Former White House adviser David Axelrod is 63. Actor Kyle MacLachlan is 59. World Golf Hall of Famer Vijay Singh is 55. Actress-comedian Rachel Dratch is 52. Actor Paul Lieberstein is 51. Actress Jeri Ryan is 50. Actor Thomas Jane is 49. TV host Clinton Kelly is 49. Actress Tamara Mello is 48. Actress-singer Lea Salonga (LAY'-uh suh-LONG'-guh) is 47. Actor Jose Solano is 47. International Tennis Hall of Famer Michael Chang is 46. Rock musician Scott Phillips is 45. Singer James Blunt is 44. Actress Drew Barrymore is 43. Actress Liza Huber is 43. Rock singer Tom Higgenson (Plain White T's) is 39. Actor Zach Roerig is 33. Actor Daniel E. Smith is 28.

Thought for Today: "The passion for setting people right is in itself an afflictive disease." — Marianne Moore, American poet (1887-1972).